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Preface

About OpenStax

OpenStax is a non-profit organization committed to improving student access to quality learning materials. Our free textbooks are developed and peer-reviewed by educators to ensure they are readable, accurate, and meet the scope and sequence requirements of modern college courses. Unlike traditional textbooks, OpenStax resources live online and are owned by the community of educators using them. Through our partnerships with companies and foundations committed to reducing costs for students, OpenStax is working to improve access to higher education for all. OpenStax is an initiative of Rice University and is made possible through the generous support of several philanthropic foundations.

About This Book

Welcome to *Introduction to Sociology*, an OpenStax resource created with several goals in mind: accessibility, affordability, customization, and student engagement—all while encouraging learners toward high levels of learning. Instructors and students alike will find that this textbook offers a strong foundation in sociology. It is available for free online and in low-cost print and e-book editions.

To broaden access and encourage community curation, *Introduction to Sociology* is “open source” licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license. Everyone is invited to submit examples, emerging research, and other feedback to enhance and strengthen the material and keep it current and relevant for today’s students. You can make suggestions by contacting us at info@openstaxcollege.org.

To the Student

This book is written for you and is based on the teaching and research experience of numerous sociologists. In today’s global socially networked world, the topic of Sociology is more relevant than ever before. We hope

that through this book, you will learn how simple, everyday human actions and interactions can change the world. In this book, you will find applications of Sociology concepts that are relevant, current, and balanced.

To the Instructor

This text is intended for a one-semester introductory course. Since current events influence our social perspectives and the field of Sociology in general, OpenStax encourages instructors to keep this book fresh by sending in your up-to-date examples to info@openstaxcollege.org so that students and instructors around the country can relate and engage in fruitful discussions.

General Approach

Introduction to Sociology adheres to the scope and sequence of a typical introductory sociology course. In addition to comprehensive coverage of core concepts, foundational scholars, and emerging theories, we have incorporated section reviews with engaging questions, discussions that help students apply the sociological imagination, and features that draw learners into the discipline in meaningful ways. Although this text can be modified and reorganized to suit your needs, the standard version is organized so that topics are introduced conceptually, with relevant, everyday experiences.

Features of OpenStax *Introduction to Sociology*

The following briefly describes the special features of this text.

Modularity

This textbook is organized on Connexions (<http://cnx.org>) as a collection of modules that can be rearranged and modified to suit the needs of a particular professor or class. That being said, modules often contain references to content in other modules, as most topics in sociology cannot be discussed in isolation.

Learning Objectives

Every module begins with a set of clear and concise learning objectives. These objectives are designed to help the instructor decide what content to include or assign, and to guide the student with respect to what he or she can expect to learn. After completing the module and end-of-module exercises, students should be able to demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives.

Key Features

The following features show students the dynamic nature of Sociology:

Sociological Research: Highlights specific current and relevant research studies. Examples include “Is Music a Cultural Universal?” and “Deceptive Divorce Rates.”

Sociology in the Real World: Ties chapter content to student life and discusses sociology in terms of the everyday. Topics include “Secrets of the McJob” and “Grade Inflation: When Is an A Really a C?”

Big Picture: Features present sociological concepts at a national or international level, including “Education in Afghanistan” and “American Indian Tribes and Environmental Racism.”

Case Study: Describes real-life people whose experiences relate to chapter content, such as “Catherine Middleton: The Commoner Who Would Be Queen.”

Social Policy and Debate: Discusses political issues that relate to chapter content, such as “The Legalese of Sex and Gender” and “Is the U.S. Bilingual?”

Section Summaries

Section summaries distill the information in each section for both students and instructors down to key, concise points addressed in the section.

Key Terms

Key terms are bold and are followed by a definition in context. Definitions of key terms are also listed in the Glossary, which appears at the end of the module online and at the end of the chapter in print.

Section Quizzes

Section quizzes provide opportunities to apply and test the information students learn throughout each section. Both multiple-choice and short-response questions feature a variety of question types and range of difficulty.

Further Research

This feature helps students further explore the section topic and offers related research topics that could be explored.

Acknowledgements

Introduction to Sociology is based on the work of numerous professors, writers, editors, and reviewers who are able to bring topics to students in the most engaging way.

We would like to thank all those listed below as well as many others who have contributed their time and energy to review and provide feedback on the manuscript. Their input has been critical in maintaining the pedagogical integrity and accuracy of the text.

Faculty Contributors

Nathan Keirns, Zane State College
Eric Strayer, Hartnell College
Heather Griffiths, Fayetteville State University

Susan Cody-Rydzewski, Georgia Perimeter College
Gail Scaramuzzo, Lackawanna College
Tommy Sadler, Union University
Sally Vyain, Ivy Tech Community College

Faculty Reviewers

Carol Jenkins, Glendale Community College
Lillian Marie Wallace, Pima Community College
J. Brandon Wallace, Middle Tennessee State University
Gerry R. Cox, professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
David Hunt, Augusta State University
Jennifer L. Newman-Shoemake, Angelo State University, and Cisco College
Matthew Morrison, University of Virginia
Sue Greer-Pitt, Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College
Faye Jones, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College
Athena Smith, Hillsborough Community College
Kim Winford, Blinn College
Kevin Keating, Broward College
Russell Davis, University of West Alabama
Kimberly Boyd, Piedmont Virginia Community College
Lynn Newhart, Rockford College
Russell C. Ward, Maysville Community and Technical College
Xuemei Hu, Union County College
Margaret A. Choka, Pellissippi State Community College
Cindy Minton, Clark State Community College
Nili Kirschner, Woodland Community College
Shonda Whetstone, Blinn College
Elizabeth Arreaga, instructor emerita at Long Beach City College
Florencio R. Riguera, Catholic University of America
John B. Gannon, College of Southern Nevada
Gerald Titchener, Des Moines Area Community College
Rahime-Malik Howard, El Centro College, and Collin College
Jeff Bry, Minnesota State Community and Technical College at Moorhead
Cynthia Tooley, Metropolitan Community College at Blue River
Carol Sebilis, Diablo Valley College

Marian Moore, Owens Community College
John Bartkowski, University of Texas at San Antonio
Shelly Dutchin, Western Technical College

Supplements

Accompanying the main text is an [Instructor's PowerPoint](#) file, which includes all of the images and captions found throughout the text and an Instructor's test bank.

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Introduction to Sociology
class="introduction"

Sociologists
study how
society affects
people and
how people
affect society.

(Photo
courtesy of
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Polcino/flickr
)



Concerts, sports games, and political rallies can have very large crowds. When you attend one of these events, you may know only the people you came with. Yet you may experience a feeling of connection to the group. You are one of the crowd. You cheer and applaud when everyone else does. You boo and yell alongside them. You move out of the way when someone needs to get by, and you say "excuse me" when you need to leave. You know how to behave in this kind of crowd.

It can be a very different experience if you are traveling in a foreign country and find yourself in a crowd moving down the street. You may have trouble figuring out what is happening. Is the crowd just the usual morning rush, or is it a political protest of some kind? Perhaps there was some sort of accident or disaster. Is it safe in this crowd, or should you try to extract yourself? How can you find out what is going on? Although you are *in* it, you may not feel like you are *part* of this crowd. You may not know what to do or how to behave.

Even within one type of crowd, different groups exist and different behaviors are on display. At a rock concert, for example, some may enjoy singing along, others prefer to sit and observe, while still others may join in a mosh pit or try crowd surfing. Why do we feel and act differently in different types of social situations? Why might people of a single group exhibit different behaviors in the same situation? Why might people acting similarly not feel connected to others exhibiting the same behavior? These are some of the many questions sociologists ask as they study people and societies.

What Is Sociology?

- Explain concepts central to sociology
- Understand how different sociological perspectives have developed



Sociologists learn about society as a whole while studying one-to-one and group interactions. (Photo courtesy of Robert S. Donovan/flickr)

A dictionary defines **sociology** as the systematic study of society and social interaction. The word “sociology” is derived from the Latin word *socius* (companion) and the Greek word *logos* (study of), meaning “the study of companionship.” While this is a starting point for the discipline, sociology is actually much more complex. It uses many different methods to study a wide range of subject matter and to apply these studies to the real world.

What Are Society and Culture?

Sociologists study all aspects and levels of society. A society is a group of people whose members interact, reside in a definable area, and share a culture. A culture includes the group’s shared practices, values, and beliefs. One sociologist might analyze video of people from different societies as they carry on everyday conversations to study the rules of polite conversation from different world cultures. Another sociologist might interview a representative sample of people to see how texting has changed the way they communicate. Yet another sociologist might study how migration determined the way in which language spread and changed over time. A fourth sociologist might be part of a team developing signs to warn people living thousands of years in the future, and speaking many different languages, to stay away from still-dangerous nuclear waste.

The Sociological Imagination

Although these studies and the methods of carrying them out are different, the sociologists involved in them all have something in common. Each of them looks at society using what pioneer sociologist C. Wright Mills called the sociological imagination, sometimes also referred to as the sociological lens or sociological perspective. Mills defined **sociological imagination** as how individuals understand their own and others' pasts in relation to history and social structure (1959).

By looking at individuals and societies and how they interact through this lens, sociologists are able to examine what influences behavior, attitudes, and culture. By applying systematic and scientific methods to this process, they try to do so without letting their own biases and pre-conceived ideas influence their conclusions.

Studying Patterns: How Sociologists View Society

All sociologists are interested in the experiences of individuals and how those experiences are shaped by interactions with social groups and society as a whole. To a sociologist, the personal decisions an individual makes do not exist in a vacuum. Cultural patterns and social forces put pressure on people to select one choice over another. Sociologists try to identify these general patterns by examining the behavior of large groups of people living in the same society and experiencing the same societal pressures.

The recent turmoil in the U.S. housing market and the high rate of foreclosures offer an example of how a sociologist might explore social patterns. Owning a home has long been considered an essential part of the American Dream. People often work for years to save for a down payment on what will be the largest investment they ever make. The monthly mortgage is often a person's largest budget item. Missing one or more mortgage payments can result in serious consequences. The lender may foreclose on the mortgage and repossess the property. People may lose their homes and may not be able to borrow money in the future. Walking away from the responsibility to pay debts is not a choice most people make easily.

About three million homes were repossessed in the United States between 2006 and 2011. Experts predict the number could double by 2013 (Levy and Gop 2011). This is a much higher rate than the historical average. What social factors are contributing to this situation, and where might sociologists find patterns? Do Americans view debt, including mortgages, differently than in the past? What role do unemployment rates play? Might a shift in class structure be an influential factor? What about the way major economic players operate?

To answer these questions, sociologists will look beyond individual foreclosures at national trends. They will see that in recent years unemployment has been at record highs.

They will observe that many lenders approved subprime mortgages with adjustable rates that started low and ballooned. They may look into whether unemployment and lending practices were different for members of different social classes, races, or genders. By analyzing the impact of these external conditions on individuals' choices, sociologists can better explain why people make the decisions they do.



Risky bank loans, falling housing prices, and high unemployment can result in higher foreclosure rates.
(Photo courtesy of Jeff Turner/flickr)

Another example of how society influences individual decisions can be seen in people's opinions about and use of food stamps (also known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP benefits). Some people believe that those who receive food stamps are lazy and unmotivated. Statistics from the United States Department of Agriculture show a complex picture.

Percent Eligible by Reason for Eligibility

	Living in Waiver Area	Have Not Exceeded Time Limits^a	In E & T Program	Received Exemption	Total Percent Eligible for the FSP^a
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Alabama	29	62 / 72	0	1	73 / 80
Alaska	100	62 / 72	0	0	100
California	6	62 / 72	0	0	64 / 74
District of Columbia	100	62 / 72	0	0	100
Florida	48	62 / 72	0	0	80 / 85
Mississippi	39	62 / 72	0	3	100
Wyoming	7	62 / 72	0	0	64 / 74

Food Stamp Use by State Sociologists examine social conditions in different states to explain differences in the number of people receiving food stamps. (Table courtesy of U.S. Department of Agriculture)

The percentage of the population receiving food stamps is much higher in certain states than in others. Does this mean, if the stereotype above were applied, that people in some states are lazier and less motivated than those in other states? Sociologists study the economies in each state—comparing unemployment rates, food, energy costs, and other factors—to explain differences in social issues like this.

To identify social trends, sociologists also study how people use food stamps and how people react to their use. Research has found that for many people from all classes, there is a strong stigma attached to the use of food stamps. This stigma can prevent people who qualify for this type of assistance from using food stamps. According to Hanson and Gundersen (2002), how strongly this stigma is felt is linked to the general economic climate. This illustrates how sociologists observe a pattern in society.

Sociologists identify and study patterns related to all kinds of contemporary social issues. The “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, the emergence of the Tea Party as a political faction, how Twitter has influenced everyday communication—these are all examples of topics that sociologists might explore.

Studying Part and Whole: How Sociologists View Social Structures

A key basis of the sociological perspective is the concept that the individual and society are inseparable. It is impossible to study one without the other. German sociologist Norbert Elias called the process of simultaneously analyzing the behavior of individuals and the society that shapes that behavior **figuration**. He described it through a metaphor of dancing. There can be no dance without the dancers, but there can be no dancers without the dance. Without the dancers, a dance is just an idea about motions in a choreographer's head. Without a dance, there is just a group of people moving around a floor. Similarly, there is no society without the individuals that make it up, and there are also no individuals who are not affected by the society in which they live (Elias 1978).

An application that makes this concept understandable is the practice of religion. While people experience their religion in a distinctly individual manner, religion exists in a larger social context. For instance, an individual's religious practice may be influenced by what government dictates, holidays, teachers, places of worship, rituals, and so on. These influences underscore the important relationship between individual practices of religion and social pressures that influence that religious experience.

Note:

Individual-Society Connections

When sociologist Nathan Kierns spoke to his friend Ashley (a pseudonym) about the move she and her partner had made from an urban center to a small Midwestern town, he was curious how the social pressures placed on a lesbian couple differed from one community to the other. Ashley said that in the city they had been accustomed to getting looks and hearing comments when she and her partner walked hand in hand. Otherwise, she felt that they were at least being tolerated. There had been little to no outright discrimination.

Things changed when they moved to the small town for her partner's job. For the first time, Ashley found herself experiencing direct discrimination because of her sexual orientation. Some of it was particularly hurtful. Landlords would not rent to them. Ashley, who is a highly trained professional, had a great deal of difficulty finding a new job. When Nathan asked Ashley if she and her partner became discouraged or bitter about this new situation, Ashley said that rather than letting it get to them, they decided to do something about it. Ashley approached groups at a local college and several churches in the area. Together they decided to form the town's first gay-straight alliance.

The alliance has worked successfully to educate their community about same-sex couples. It also worked to raise awareness about the kinds of discrimination Ashley and her partner experienced in the town and how those could be eliminated. The alliance has become a strong advocacy group, working to attain equal rights for LGBT individuals.

Kierns observed that this is an excellent example of how negative social forces can result in a positive response from individuals to bring about social change (Kierns 2011).

Summary

Sociology is the systematic study of society and social interaction. In order to carry out their studies, sociologists identify cultural patterns and social forces and determine how they affect individuals and groups. They also develop ways to apply their findings to the real world.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: Which of the following best describes sociology as a subject?

- a. The study of individual behavior
- b. The study of cultures
- c. The study of society and social interaction
- d. The study of economics

Solution:

Answers

C

Exercise:

Problem:

C. Wright Mills once said that sociologists need to develop a sociological _____ to study how society affects individuals.

- a. culture
- b. imagination
- c. method
- d. tool

Solution:

Answers

B

Exercise:

Problem:

A sociologist defines society as a group of people who reside in a defined area, share a culture, and who:

- a. interact
 - b. work in the same industry
 - c. speak different languages
 - d. practice a recognized religion
-

Solution:**Answers**

A

Exercise:

Problem: Seeing patterns means that a sociologist needs to be able to:

- a. compare the behavior of individuals from different societies
 - b. compare one society to another
 - c. identify similarities in how social groups respond to social pressure
 - d. compare individuals to groups
-

Solution:**Answers**

C

Short Answer**Exercise:****Problem:**

What do you think C. Wright Mills meant when he said that to be a sociologist, one had to develop a sociological imagination?

Exercise:**Problem:**

Describe a situation in which a choice you made was influenced by societal pressures.

Further Research

Sociology is a broad discipline. Different kinds of sociologists employ various methods for exploring the relationship between individuals and society. Check out more about sociology at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/what-is-sociology>.

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Glossary

figuration

the process of simultaneously analyzing the behavior of an individual and the society that shapes that behavior

sociological imagination

the ability to understand how your own past relates to that of other people, as well as to history in general and societal structures in particular

sociology

is the systematic study of society and social interaction

The History of Sociology

- Explain why sociology emerged when it did
- Describe how sociology became a separate academic discipline



People have been thinking like sociologists long before sociology became a separate academic discipline: Plato and Aristotle, Confucius, Khaldun, and Voltaire all set the stage for modern sociology. (Photos (a),(b),(d) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; Photo (c) courtesy of Moumou82/Wikimedia Commons)

Since ancient times, people have been fascinated by the relationship between individuals and the societies to which they belong. Many of the topics that are central to modern sociological scholarship were studied by ancient philosophers. Many of these earlier thinkers were motivated by their desire to describe an ideal society.

In the 13th century, Ma Tuan-Lin, a Chinese historian, first recognized social dynamics as an underlying component of historical development in his seminal encyclopedia, *General Study of Literary Remains*. The next century saw the emergence of the historian some consider to be the world's first sociologist: Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) of Tunisia. He wrote about many topics of interest today, setting a foundation for both modern sociology and economics, including a theory of social conflict, a comparison of nomadic and sedentary life, a description of political

economy, and a study connecting a tribe's social cohesion to its capacity for power (Hannoum 2003).

In the 18th century, Age of Enlightenment philosophers developed general principles that could be used to explain social life. Thinkers such as John Locke, Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Hobbes responded to what they saw as social ills by writing on topics that they hoped would lead to social reform.

The early 19th century saw great changes with the Industrial Revolution, increased mobility, and new kinds of employment. It was also a time of great social and political upheaval with the rise of empires that exposed many people—for the first time—to societies and cultures other than their own. Millions of people were moving into cities and many people were turning away from their traditional religious beliefs.

The Father of Sociology



Auguste
Comte is
considered
by many to
be the father
of sociology.

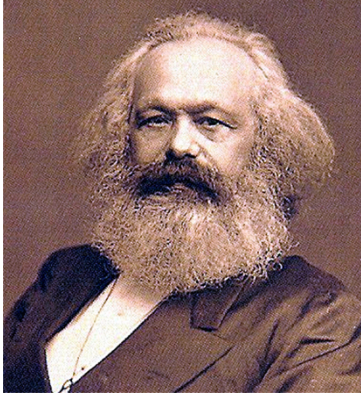
(Photo

courtesy of
Wikimedia
Commons)

The term sociology was first coined in 1780 by the French essayist Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836) in an unpublished manuscript (Fauré et al. 1999). In 1838, the term was reinvented by Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Comte originally studied to be an engineer, but later became a pupil of social philosopher Claude Henri de Rouvroy Comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825). They both thought that society could be studied using the same scientific methods utilized in natural sciences. Comte also believed in the potential of social scientists to work toward the betterment of society. He held that once scholars identified the laws that governed society, sociologists could address problems such as poor education and poverty (Abercrombie et al. 2000).

Comte named the scientific study of social patterns **positivism**. He described his philosophy in a series of books called *The Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830–1842) and *A General View of Positivism* (1848). He believed that using scientific methods to reveal the laws by which societies and individuals interact would usher in a new “positivist” age of history. While the field and its terminology have grown, sociologists still believe in the positive impact of their work.

Karl Marx



Karl Marx was one of the founders of sociology. His ideas about social conflict are still relevant today.
(Photo courtesy of John Mayall/Wikimedia Commons)

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was a German philosopher and economist. In 1848 he and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) coauthored the *Communist Manifesto*. This book is one of the most influential political manuscripts in history. It also presents Marx's theory of society, which differed from what Comte proposed.

Marx rejected Comte's positivism. He believed that societies grew and changed as a result of the struggles of different social classes over the means of production. At the time he was developing his theories, the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism led to great disparities in wealth between the owners of the factories and workers. Capitalism, an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of goods and the means to produce them, grew in many nations.

Marx predicted that inequalities of capitalism would become so extreme that workers would eventually revolt. This would lead to the collapse of capitalism, which would be replaced by communism. Communism is an economic system under which there is no private or corporate ownership: everything is owned communally and distributed as needed. Marx believed that communism was a more equitable system than capitalism.

While his economic predictions may not have come true in the time frame he predicted, Marx's idea that social conflict leads to change in society is still one of the major theories used in modern sociology.

Creating a Discipline

In 1873, the English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) published *The Study of Sociology*, the first book with the term “sociology” in the title. Spencer rejected much of Comte's philosophy as well as Marx's theory of class struggle and his support of communism. Instead, he favored a form of government that allowed market forces to control capitalism. His work influenced many early sociologists including Émile Durkheim (1858–1917).

Durkheim helped establish sociology as a formal academic discipline by establishing the first European department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1895 and by publishing his *Rules of the Sociological Method* in 1895. In another important work, *Division of Labour in Society* (1893), Durkheim laid out his theory on how societies transformed from a primitive state into a capitalist, industrial society. According to Durkheim, people rise to their proper level in society based on merit.

Durkheim believed that sociologists could study objective “social facts” (Poggi 2000). He also believed that through such studies it would be possible to determine if a society was “healthy” or “pathological.” He saw healthy societies as stable, while pathological societies experienced a breakdown in social norms between individuals and society.

In 1897, Durkheim attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of his rules of social research when he published a work titled *Suicide*. Durkheim

examined suicide statistics in different police districts to research differences between Catholic and Protestant communities. He attributed the differences to socioreligious forces rather than to individual or psychological causes.

Prominent sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) established a sociology department in Germany at the Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich in 1919. Weber wrote on many topics related to sociology including political change in Russia and social forces that affect factory workers. He is known best for his 1904 book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The theory that Weber sets forth in this book is still controversial. Some believe that Weber was arguing that the beliefs of many Protestants, especially Calvinists, led to the creation of capitalism. Others interpret it as simply claiming that the ideologies of capitalism and Protestantism are complementary.

Weber also made a major contribution to the methodology of sociological research. Along with other researchers such as Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) and Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936), Weber believed that it was difficult if not impossible to use standard scientific methods to accurately predict the behavior of groups as people hoped to do. They argued that the influence of culture on human behavior had to be taken into account. This even applied to the researchers themselves, who, they believed, should be aware of how their own cultural biases could influence their research. To deal with this problem, Weber and Dilthey introduced the concept of *verstehen*, a German word that means to understand in a deep way. In seeking *verstehen*, outside observers of a social world—an entire culture or a small setting—attempt to understand it from an insider’s point of view.

In his book *The Nature of Social Action* (1922), Weber described sociology as striving to "interpret the meaning of social action and thereby give a causal explanation of the way in which action proceeds and the effects it produces." He and other like-minded sociologists proposed a philosophy of **antipositivism** whereby social researchers would strive for subjectivity as they worked to represent social processes, cultural norms, and societal values. This approach led to some research methods whose aim was not to

generalize or predict (traditional in science), but to systematically gain an in-depth understanding of social worlds.

The different approaches to research based on positivism or antipositivism are often considered the foundation for the differences found today between quantitative sociology and qualitative sociology. **Quantitative sociology** uses statistical methods such as surveys with large numbers of participants. Researchers analyze data using statistical techniques to see if they can uncover patterns of human behavior. **Qualitative sociology** seeks to understand human behavior by learning about it through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and analysis of content sources (like books, magazines, journals, and popular media).

Note:

How Do Working Moms Impact Society?

What constitutes a “typical family” in America has changed tremendously over the past decades. One of the most notable changes has been the increasing number of mothers who work outside the home. Earlier in U.S. society, most family households consisted of one parent working outside the home and the other being the primary childcare provider. Because of traditional gender roles and family structures, this was typically a working father and a stay-at-home mom. Quantitative research shows that in 1940 only 27 percent of all women worked outside the home. Today, 59.2 percent of all women do. Almost half of women with children younger than one year of age are employed (U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee Report 2010).

Sociologists interested in this topic might approach its study from a variety of angles. One might be interested in its impact on a child’s development, another may explore related economic values, while a third might examine how other social institutions have responded to this shift in society.

A sociologist studying the impact of working mothers on a child’s development might ask questions about children raised in childcare settings. How is a child socialized differently when raised largely by a childcare provider rather than a parent? Do early experiences in a school-like childcare setting lead to improved academic performance later in life?

How does a child with two working parents perceive gender roles compared to a child raised with a stay-at-home parent?

Another sociologist might be interested in the increase in working mothers from an economic perspective. Why do so many households today have dual incomes? Has there been a contributing change in social class expectations? What impact does the larger economy play in the economic conditions of an individual household? Do people view money—savings, spending, debt—differently than they have in the past?

Curiosity about this trend's influence on social institutions might lead a researcher to explore its effect on the nation's educational system. Has the increase in working mothers shifted traditional family responsibilities onto schools, such as providing lunch and even breakfast for students? How does the creation of after-school care programs shift resources away from traditional academics?

As these examples show, sociologists study many real-world topics. Their research often influences social policies and political issues. Results from sociological studies on this topic might play a role in developing federal laws like the Family and Medical Leave Act, or they might bolster the efforts of an advocacy group striving to reduce social stigmas placed on stay-at-home dads, or they might help governments determine how to best allocate funding for education.

Summary

Sociology was developed as a way to study and try to understand the changes to society brought on by the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some of the earliest sociologists thought that societies and individuals' roles in society could be studied using the same scientific methodologies that were used in the natural sciences, while others believed that it was impossible to predict human behavior scientifically, and still others debated the value of such predictions. Those perspectives continue to be represented within sociology today.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following was a topic of study in early sociology?

- a. Astrology
- b. Economics
- c. Physics
- d. History

Solution:

Answers

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Which founder of sociology believed societies changed due to class struggle?

- a. Emile Comte
- b. Karl Marx
- c. Plato
- d. Herbert Spencer

Solution:

Answers

B

Exercise:

Problem:

The difference between positivism and antipositivism relates to:

- a. whether individuals like or dislike their society
 - b. whether research methods use statistical data or person-to-person research
 - c. whether sociological studies can predict or improve society
 - d. all of the above
-

Solution:

Answers

C

Exercise:

Problem: Which would a quantitative sociologists use to gather data?

- a. A large survey
 - b. A literature search
 - c. An in-depth interview
 - d. A review of television programs
-

Solution:

Answers

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Weber believed humans could not be studied purely objectively because they were influenced by:

- a. drugs
 - b. their culture
 - c. their genetic makeup
 - d. the researcher
-

**Solution:
Answers**

B

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

What do you make of Karl Marx's contributions to sociology? What perceptions of Marx have you been exposed to in your society, and how do those perceptions influence your views?

Exercise:

Problem:

Do you tend to place more value on qualitative or quantitative research? Why? Does it matter what topic is being studied?

Further Research

Many sociologists helped shape the discipline. To learn more about prominent sociologists and how they changed sociology check out <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ferdinand-toennies>.

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Glossary

antipositivism

the view that social researchers should strive for subjectivity as they worked to represent social processes, cultural norms, and societal values

positivism

the scientific study of social patterns

qualitative sociology

in-depth interviews, focus groups, and/or analysis of content sources as the source of its data

quantitative sociology

statistical methods such as surveys with large numbers of participants

verstehen

a German word that means to understand in a deep way

Theoretical Perspectives

- Explain what sociological theories are and how they are used
- Understand the similarities and differences between structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism



Sociologists develop theories to explain social occurrences such as protest rallies. (Photo courtesy of [voanews.com/Wikimedia Commons](https://www.voanews.com/Wikimedia))

Sociologists study social events, interactions, and patterns. They then develop theories to explain why these occur and what can result from them. In sociology, a **theory** is a way to explain different aspects of social interactions and to create testable propositions about society (Allan 2006).

For example, early in the development of sociology, Émile Durkheim was interested in explaining the social phenomenon of suicide. He gathered data on large groups of people in Europe who had ended their lives. When he analyzed the data, he found that suicide rates differed among groups with different religious affiliations. For example, the data showed that Protestants were more likely to commit suicide than Catholics.

To explain this, Durkheim developed the concept of social solidarity. **Social solidarity** described the social ties that bind a group of people together such as kinship, shared location, or religion. Durkheim combined these concepts with the data he analyzed to propose a theory that explained the religion-based differences in suicide rates. He suggested that differences in social solidarity between the two groups corresponded to the differences in suicide rates.

Although some have disagreed with his methods and his conclusions, Durkheim's work shows the importance of theory in sociology. Proposing theories supported by data gives sociologists a way to explain social patterns and to posit cause-and-effect relationships in social situations.

Theories vary in scope depending on the scale of the issues they are meant to explain. **Grand theories**, also described as **macro-level**, are attempts to explain large-scale relationships and answer fundamental questions such as why societies form and why they change. These theories tend to be abstract and can be difficult if not impossible to test empirically. **Micro-level theories** are at the other end of the scale and cover very specific relationships between individuals or small groups. They are dependent on their context and are more concrete. This means they are more scientifically testable.

An example of a micro-theory would be a theory to explain why middle-class teenage girls text to communicate instead of making telephone calls. A sociologist might develop a hypothesis that the reason they do this is because they think texting is silent and therefore more private. A sociologist might then conduct interviews or design a survey to test this hypothesis. If there is enough supportive data, a hypothesis can become a theory.

Sociological theory is constantly evolving and should never be considered complete. Classic sociological theories are still considered important and current, but new sociological theories build upon the work of their predecessors and add to them (Calhoun 2002).

In sociology, a few theories provide broad perspectives that help to explain many different aspects of social life. These theories are so prominent that many consider them paradigms. **Paradigms** are philosophical and

theoretical frameworks used within a discipline to formulate theories, generalizations, and the experiments performed in support of them. Three of these paradigms have come to dominate sociological thinking because they provide useful explanations: structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

Sociological Paradigm	Level of Analysis	Focus
Structural Functionalism	Macro or mid	How each part of society functions together to contribute to the whole
Conflict Theory	Macro	How inequalities contribute to social differences and perpetuate differences in power
Symbolic Interactionism	Micro	One-to-one interactions and communications

Sociological Theories or Perspectives Different sociological perspectives enable sociologists to view social issues through a variety of useful lenses.

Functionalism

Functionalism, also called structural functional theory, sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of individuals who make up that society. It is the oldest of the main theories of sociology. In fact, its origins began before sociology emerged as a formal discipline. It grew out of the writings of English philosopher and biologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) who likened society to a human body. He argued that just as the various organs in the body work together to keep the entire system functioning and regulated, the various parts of

society work together to keep the entire society functioning and regulated (Spencer 1898). By parts of society, Spencer was referring to such social institutions as the economy, political systems, healthcare, education, media, and religion. Spencer continued the analogy by pointing out that societies evolve just as the bodies of humans and other animals do (Maryanski and Turner 1992).

One of the founders of sociology, Emile Durkheim, applied Spencer's analogy to explain the structure of societies and how they change and survive over time. Durkheim believed that earlier, more primitive societies were held together because most people performed similar tasks and shared values, language, and symbols. They exchanged goods and services in similar ways. Modern societies, according to Durkheim, were more complex. People served many different functions in society and their ability to carry out their function depended upon others being able to carry out theirs. Durkheim's theory sees society as a complex system of interrelated parts, working together to maintain stability (Durkheim 1893). According to this sociological viewpoint, the parts of society are interdependent. This means each part influences the others. In a healthy society, all of these parts work together to produce a stable state called **dynamic equilibrium** (Parsons 1961).

Durkheim believed that individuals may make up society, but in order to study society, sociologists have to look beyond individuals to social facts. **Social facts** are the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life (Durkheim 1895). Each of these social facts serves one or more functions within a society. For example, one function of a society's laws may be to protect society from violence, while another is to punish criminal behavior, while another is to preserve public health.

The English sociologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) shared Comte's and Durkheim's views. He believed that how these functions worked together to maintain a stable society was controlled by laws that could be discovered through systematic comparison (Broce 1973). Like Durkheim, he argued that explanations of social interactions had to be made at the social level and not involve the wants and needs of individuals

(Goldschmidt 1996). He defined the **function** of any recurrent activity as the part it plays in the social life as a whole, and thereby, the contribution it makes to structural continuity (Radcliffe-Brown 1952).

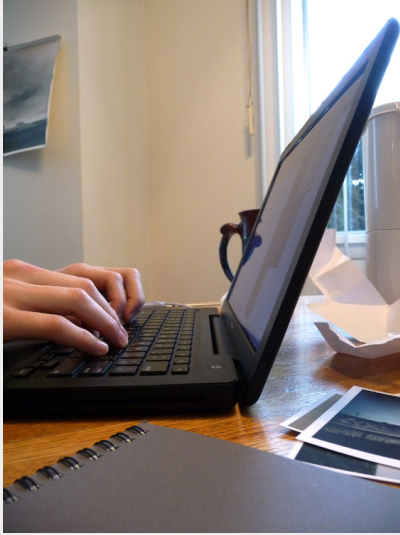
Another noted structural functionalist, Robert Merton (1910–2003), pointed out that social processes often have many functions. **Manifest functions** are the consequences of a social process that are sought or anticipated, while **latent functions** are the unsought consequences of a social process. A manifest function of college education, for example, includes gaining knowledge, preparing for a career, and finding a good job that utilizes that education. Latent functions of your college years include meeting new people, participating in extracurricular activities, or even finding a spouse or partner. Another latent function of education is creating a hierarchy of employment based on the level of education attained. Latent functions can be beneficial, neutral, or harmful. Social processes that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society are called **dysfunctions**. In education, examples of dysfunction include getting bad grades, truancy, dropping out, not graduating, and not finding suitable employment.

Criticism

Structural-functionalism was the sociological paradigm that prevailed between World War II and the Vietnam War. Its influence declined in the 1960s and 1970s because many sociologists believed that it could not adequately explain the many rapid social changes taking place at the time. Many sociologists now believe that structural functionalism is no longer useful as a macro-level theory, but that it does serve as useful purpose in many mid-range analyses.

Note:

A Global Culture?



Some sociologists see the online world contributing to the creation of an emerging global culture. Are you a part of any global communities? (Photo courtesy of [quasireversible/flickr](#))

Sociologists around the world are looking closely for signs of what would be an unprecedented event: the emergence of a global culture. In the past, empires such as those that existed in China, Europe, Africa, and Central and South America linked people from many different countries, but those people rarely became part of a common culture. They lived too far from each other, spoke different languages, practiced different religions, and traded few goods. Today, increases in communication, travel, and trade have made the world a much smaller place. More and more people are able to communicate with each other instantly—wherever they are located—by telephone, video, and text. They share movies, television shows, music, games, and information over the internet. Students can study with teachers

and pupils from the other side of the globe. Governments find it harder to hide conditions inside their countries from the rest of the world. Sociologists are researching many different aspects of this potential global culture. Some are exploring the dynamics involved in the social interactions of global online communities, such as when members feel a closer kinship to other group members than to people residing in their own country. Other sociologists are studying the impact this growing international culture has on smaller, less-powerful local cultures. Yet other researchers are exploring how international markets and the outsourcing of labor impact social inequalities. Sociology can play a key role in people's ability to understand the nature of this emerging global culture and how to respond to it.

Conflict Theory

Another theory with a macro-level view, called **conflict theory**, looks at society as a competition for limited resources. Conflict theory sees society as being made up of individuals who must compete for social, political, and material resources such as political power, leisure time, money, housing, and entertainment. Social structures and organizations such as religious groups, governments, and corporations reflect this competition in their inherent inequalities. Some individuals and organizations are able to obtain and keep more resources than others. These "winners" use their power and influence to maintain their positions of power in society and to suppress the advancement of other individuals and groups. Of the early founders of sociology, Karl Marx is most closely identified with this theory. He focused on the economic conflict between different social classes. As he and Fredrick Engels famously described in their *Communist Manifesto*, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed" (1848).

Developing on this foundation, Polish-Austrian sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838–1909) expanded on Marx's ideas to develop his own version of conflict theory, adding his knowledge about how civilizations

evolve. In *Outlines of Sociology* (1884), he argues that war and conquest are the basis on which civilizations have been shaped. He believed that cultural and ethnic conflicts led to states being identified and defined by a dominant group that had power over other groups (Irving 2007).

The German sociologist Max Weber agreed with Marx that the economic inequalities of the capitalist system were a source of widespread conflict. However, he disagreed that the conflict must lead to revolution and the collapse of capitalism. Weber theorized that there was more than one cause for conflict: besides economics, inequalities could exist over political power and social status. The level of inequalities could also be different for different groups based on education, race, or gender. As long as these conflicts remained separate, the system as a whole was not threatened.

Weber also identified several factors that moderated people's reaction to inequality. If the authority of the people in power was considered legitimate by those over whom they had power, then conflicts were less intense. Other moderating factors were high rates of social mobility and low rates of class difference.

Another German sociologist, Georg Simmel (1858–1918), wrote that conflict can in fact help integrate and stabilize a society. Like Weber, Simmel said that the nature of social conflict was highly variable. The intensity and violence of the conflict depended upon the emotional involvement of the different sides, the degree of solidarity among the opposing groups, and if there were clear and limited goals to be achieved. Simmel also said that frequent smaller conflicts would be less violent than a few large conflicts.

Simmel also studied how conflict changes the parties involved. He showed that groups work to increase their internal solidarity, centralize power, reduce dissent, and become less tolerant of those not in the group during conflict. Resolving conflicts can release tension and hostility and pave the way for future agreements.

More recently, conflict theory has been used to explain inequalities between groups based on gender or race. Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1941–2006) was a leader in the field of feminist conflict theory. Her books

Masculine/Feminine or Human (1974), *Feminist Sociology* (1988), and *Gender Equity* (1990) and other studies Dr. Chafetz uses conflict theory to present a set of models to explain the forces maintaining a system of gender inequality as well as a theory of how such a system can be changed. She argues that two types of forces sustain a system of gender inequality. One type of force is coercive and is based on the advantages men have in finding, keeping, and advancing in positions within the workforce. The other depends on the voluntary choices individuals make based on the gender roles that have been passed down through their families. Chafetz argues that the system can be changed through changes in the number and types of jobs available to increasingly large numbers of well-educated women entering the workforce (Turner 2003).

Criticism

Just as structural functionalism was criticized for focusing too much on the stability of societies, conflict theory has been criticized because it tends to focus on conflict to the exclusion of recognizing stability. Many social structures are extremely stable or have gradually progressed over time rather than changing abruptly as conflict theory would suggest.

Note:

Farming and Locavores: How Sociological Perspectives Might View Food Consumption

The consumption of food is a commonplace, daily occurrence, yet it can also be associated with important moments in our lives. Eating can be an individual or a group action, and eating habits and customs are influenced by our cultures. In the context of society, our nation's food system is at the core of numerous social movements, political issues, and economic debates. Any of these factors might become a topic of sociological study. A structural-functional approach to the topic of food consumption might be interested in the role of the agriculture industry within the nation's economy and how this has changed from the early days of manual-labor farming to modern mechanized production. Another examination might

study the different functions that occur in food production: from farming and harvesting to flashy packaging and mass consumerism.

A conflict theorist might be interested in the power differentials present in the regulation of food, exploring where people's right to information intersects with corporations' drive for profit and how the government mediates those interests. Or a conflict theorist might be interested in the power and powerlessness experienced by local farmers versus large farming conglomerates, such as the documentary *Food Inc.* depicts as resulting from Monsanto's patenting of seed technology. Another topic of study might be how nutrition varies between different social classes.

A sociologist viewing food consumption through a symbolic interactionist lens would be more interested in micro-level topics, such as the symbolic use of food in religious rituals, or the role it plays in the social interaction of a family dinner. This perspective might also study the interactions among group members who identify themselves based on their sharing a particular diet, such as vegetarians (people who don't eat meat) or locavores (people who strive to eat locally produced food).

Symbolic Interactionist Theory

Symbolic Interactionism provides a theoretical perspective that helps scholars examine the relationship of individuals within their society. This perspective is centered on the notion that communication—or the exchange of meaning through language and symbols—is how people make sense of their social worlds. As pointed out by Herman and Reynolds (1994), this viewpoint sees people as active in shaping their world, rather than as entities who are acted upon by society (Herman and Reynolds 1994). This approach looks at society and people from a micro-level perspective.

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) is considered one of the founders of symbolic interactionism, though he never published his work on it (LaRossa & Reitzes 1993). It was up to his student Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) to interpret Mead's work and popularize the theory. Blumer coined the term “symbolic interactionism” and identified its three basic premises:

1. Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things.
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society.
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters (Blumer 1969).

Social scientists who apply symbolic-interactionist thinking look for patterns of interaction between individuals. Their studies often involve observation of one-on-one interactions. For example, while a conflict theorist studying a political protest might focus on class difference, a symbolic interactionist would be more interested in how individuals in the protesting group interact, as well as the signs and symbols protesters use to communicate their message. The focus on the importance of symbols in building a society led sociologists like Erving Goffman (1922-1982) to develop a technique called **dramaturgical analysis**. Goffman used theater as an analogy for social interaction and recognized that people's interactions showed patterns of cultural "scripts." Because it can be unclear what part a person may play in a given situation, he or she has to improvise his or her role as the situation unfolds (Goffman 1958).

Studies that use the symbolic interactionist perspective are more likely to use qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or participant observation, because they seek to understand the symbolic worlds in which research subjects live.

Criticism

Research done from this perspective is often scrutinized because of the difficulty of remaining objective. Others criticize the extremely narrow focus on symbolic interaction. Proponents, of course, consider this one of its greatest strengths.

Summary

Sociologists develop theories to explain social events, interactions, and patterns. A theory is a proposed explanation of those patterns. Theories have different scales. Macro-level theories, such as structural functionalism and conflict theory, attempt to explain how societies operate as a whole. Micro-level theories, such as symbolic interactionism, focus on interactions between individuals.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of these theories is most likely to look at the social world on a micro level?

- a. Structural functionalism
- b. Conflict theory
- c. Positivism
- d. Symbolic interactionism

Solution:

D

Exercise:

Problem:

Who believed that the history of society was one of class struggle?

- a. Emile Durkheim
- b. Karl Marx
- c. Erving Goffmann
- d. George Herbert Mead

Solution:

B

Exercise:

Problem: Who coined the phrase symbolic interactionism?

- a. Herbert Blumer
 - b. Max Weber
 - c. Lester F. Ward
 - d. W.I. Thomas
-

Solution:

A

Exercise:

Problem:

A symbolic interactionist may compare social interactions to:

- a. behaviors
 - b. conflicts
 - c. human organs
 - d. theatrical roles
-

Solution:

D

Exercise:

Problem:

Which research technique would most likely be used by a symbolic interactionist?

- a. Surveys
- b. Participant observation

- c. Quantitative data analysis
 - d. None of the above
-

Solution:

B

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Which theory do you think better explains how societies operate—structural functionalism or conflict theory? Why?

Exercise:

Problem:

Do you think the way people behave in social interactions is more like the behavior of animals or more like actors playing a role in a theatrical production? Why?

Further Research

People often think of all conflict as violent, but many conflicts can be resolved nonviolently. To learn more about nonviolent methods of conflict resolution check out the Albert Einstein Institution

<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ae-institution>

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Glossary

conflict theory

a theory that looks at society as a competition for limited resources

dramaturgical analysis

a technique sociologists use in which they view society through the metaphor of theatrical performance

dynamic equilibrium

a stable state in which all parts of a healthy society are working together properly

dysfunctions

social patterns that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society

function

the part a recurrent activity plays in the social life as a whole and the contribution it makes to structural continuity

functionalism

a theoretical approach that sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of individuals that make up that society

grand theories

attempts to explain large-scale relationships and answer fundamental questions such as why societies form and why they change

latent functions

the unrecognized or unintended consequences of a social process

macro-level

a wide-scale view of the role of social structures within a society

manifest functions

sought consequences of a social process

micro-level theories

the study of specific relationships between individuals or small groups

paradigms

philosophical and theoretical frameworks used within a discipline to formulate theories, generalizations, and the experiments performed in support of them

social facts

the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life

social solidarity

the social ties that bind a group of people together such as kinship, shared location, and religion

symbolic interactionism

a theoretical perspective through which scholars examine the relationship of individuals within their society by studying their communication (language and symbols)

theory

a proposed explanation about social interactions or society

Why Study Sociology?

- Explain why it is worthwhile to study sociology
- Identify ways sociology is applied in the real world



The research
of
sociologists
Kenneth and
Mamie Clark
helped the
Supreme
Court decide
to end
“separate but
equal” racial
segregation
in schools in
the United
States.
(Photo
courtesy of
public
domain)

When Elizabeth Eckford tried to enter Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in September 1957, she was met by an angry crowd. But she knew she had the law on her side. Three years earlier in the landmark *Brown vs. the Board of Education* case, the U.S. Supreme Court had overturned 21 state laws that allowed blacks and whites to be taught in separate school systems as long as the school systems were “equal.” One of the major factors influencing that decision was research conducted by the husband-and-wife team of sociologists, Kenneth and Mamie Clark. Their research showed that segregation was harmful to young black schoolchildren, and the Court found that harm to be unconstitutional.

Since it was first founded, many people interested in sociology have been driven by the scholarly desire to contribute knowledge to this field, while others have seen it as way not only to study society, but also to improve it. Besides desegregation, sociology has played a crucial role in many important social reforms such as equal opportunity for women in the workplace, improved treatment for individuals with mental handicaps or learning disabilities, increased accessibility and accommodation for people with physical handicaps, the right of native populations to preserve their land and culture, and prison system reforms.

The prominent sociologist Peter L. Berger (1929–), in his 1963 book *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, describes a sociologist as “someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way.” He asserts that sociologists have a natural interest in the monumental moments of people’s lives, as well as a fascination with banal, everyday occurrences. Berger also describes the “aha” moment when a sociological theory becomes applicable and understood:

“[T]here is a deceptive simplicity and obviousness about some sociological investigations. One reads them, nods at the familiar scene, remarks that one has heard all this before and don't people have better things to do than to waste their time on truisms—until one is suddenly brought up against an insight that radically questions everything one had previously assumed about this familiar scene. This is the point at which one begins to sense the excitement of sociology. (Berger 1963)”

Sociology can be exciting because it teaches people ways to recognize how they fit into the world and how others perceive them. Looking at themselves and society from a sociological perspective helps people see where they connect to different groups based on the many different ways they classify themselves and how society classifies them in turn. It raises awareness of how those classifications—such as economic and status levels, education, ethnicity, or sexual orientation—affect perceptions.

Sociology teaches people not to accept easy explanations. It teaches them a way to organize their thinking so that they can ask better questions and formulate better answers. It makes people more aware that there are many different kinds of people in the world who do not necessarily think the way they do. It increases their willingness and ability to try to see the world from other people's perspectives. This prepares them to live and work in an increasingly diverse and integrated world.

Sociology in the Workplace

Employers continue to seek people with what are called “transferable skills.” This means that they want to hire people whose knowledge and education can be applied in a variety of settings and whose skills will contribute to various tasks. Studying sociology can provide people with this wide knowledge and a skill set that can contribute to many workplaces, including:

- an understanding of social systems and large bureaucracies,
- the ability to devise and carry out research projects to assess whether a program or policy is working,
- the ability to collect, read, and analyze statistical information from polls or surveys,
- the ability to recognize important differences in people’s social, cultural, and economic backgrounds,
- skills in preparing reports and communicating complex ideas,

- the capacity for critical thinking about social issues and problems that confront modern society. (Department of Sociology, University of Alabama)

Sociology prepares people for a wide variety of careers. Besides actually conducting social research or training others in the field, people who graduate from college with a degree in sociology are hired by government agencies and corporations in fields such as social services, counseling (e.g., family planning, career, substance abuse), community planning, health services, marketing, market research, and human resources. Even a small amount of training in sociology can be an asset in careers like sales, public relations, journalism, teaching, law, and criminal justice.

Note:

Please “Friend” Me: Students and Social Networking

The phenomenon known as Facebook was designed specifically for students. Whereas earlier generations wrote notes in each other’s printed yearbooks at the end of the academic year, modern technology and the internet ushered in dynamic new ways for people to interact socially. Instead of having to meet up on campus, students can call, text, and Skype from their dorm rooms. Instead of a study group gathering weekly in the library, online forums and chat rooms help learners connect. The availability and immediacy of computer technology has forever changed the ways students engage with each other.

Now, after several social networks have vied for primacy, a few have established their place in the market and some have attracted niche audience. While Facebook launched the social networking trend geared toward teens and young adults, now people of all ages are actively “friending” each other. LinkedIn distinguished itself by focusing on professional connections, serving as a virtual world for workplace networking. Newer offshoots like Foursquare help people connect based on the real-world places they frequent, while Twitter has cornered the market on brevity.

These newer modes of social interaction have also spawned harmful consequences, such as cyberbullying and what some call FAD, or Facebook Addiction Disorder. Researchers have also examined other potential negative impacts, such as whether Facebooking lowers a student's GPA, or whether there might be long-term effects of replacing face-to-face interaction with social media.

All of these social networks demonstrate emerging ways that people interact, whether positive or negative. They illustrate how sociological topics are alive and changing today. Social media will most certainly be a developing topic in the study of sociology for decades to come.

Summary

Studying sociology is beneficial both for the individual and for society. By studying sociology people learn how to think critically about social issues and problems that confront our society. The study of sociology enriches students' lives and prepares them for careers in an increasingly diverse world. Society benefits because people with sociological training are better prepared to make informed decisions about social issues and take effective action to deal with them.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Kenneth and Mamie Clark used sociological research to show that segregation was:

- a. beneficial
- b. harmful
- c. illegal
- d. of no importance

Solution:

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Studying Sociology helps people analyze data because they learn:

- a. interview techniques
- b. to apply statistics
- c. to generate theories
- d. all of the above

Solution:

D

Exercise:

Problem: Berger describes sociologists as concerned with:

- a. monumental moments in people's lives
- b. common everyday life events
- c. both a and b
- d. none of the above

Solution:

C

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

How do you think taking a sociology course might affect your social interactions?

Exercise:**Problem:**

What sort of career are you interested in? How could studying sociology help you in this career?

Further Research

Social communication is rapidly evolving due to ever improving technologies. To learn more about how sociologists study the impact of these changes check out <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/media>

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Introduction to Sociological Research

class="introduction"

Concertgoers enjoy a show. What makes listening to live music among a crowd of people appealing? How are the motivations and behaviors of groups of people at concerts different from those of groups in other settings, such as theme parks? These are questions that sociological research can aim to answer. (Photo courtesy of

Benjamin
Cook/flickr)



In the campus cafeteria, you set your lunch tray down at a table, grab a chair, join a group of your college classmates, and hear the start of two discussions. One person says, “It’s weird how Jimmy Buffett has so many devoted fans.” Another says, “Disney World is packed year-round.” Those two seemingly benign statements are claims, or opinions, based on everyday observation of human behavior. Perhaps the speakers had firsthand experience, talked to experts, conducted online research, or saw news segments on TV.

In response, two conversations erupt.

“I don’t see why anyone would want to go to Disney World and stand in those long lines.”

“Are you kidding?! Going to Disney World is one of my favorite childhood memories.”

“It’s the opposite for me with Jimmy Buffett. After seeing one of his shows, I don’t need to go again.”

“Yet some people make it a lifestyle.”

“A theme park is way different than a concert.”

“But both are places people go for the same thing: a good time.”

“If you call getting lost in a crowd of thousands of strangers fun.”

As your classmates at the lunch table discuss what they know or believe, the two topics converge. The conversation becomes a debate. Someone compares Parrotheads to Packers fans. Someone else compares Disney World to a cruise. Students take sides, agreeing or disagreeing, as the conversation veers to topics such as crowd control, mob mentality, political protests, and group dynamics.

If you contributed your expanding knowledge of sociological research to this conversation, you might make statements like these:

“Jimmy Buffett’s fans long for escapism. Parrotheads join together claiming they want freedom, except they only want a temporary escape.”

And this: “Mickey Mouse is a symbol of America just like the Statue of Liberty. Disney World is a place where families go to celebrate what they see as America.”

You finish lunch, clear away your tray, and hurry to your next class. But you are thinking of Jimmy Buffett and Disney World. You have a new perspective on human behavior and a list of questions that you want answered. That is the purpose of sociological research—to investigate and provide insights into how human societies function. Although claims and opinions are part of sociology, sociologists use **empirical evidence** (that is, evidence corroborated by direct experience and/or observation) combined

with the scientific method or an interpretive framework to deliver sound sociological research. They also rely on a theoretical foundation that provides an interpretive perspective through which they can make sense of scientific results.

A truly scientific sociological study of the social situations up for discussion in the cafeteria would involve these prescribed steps: defining a specific question, gathering information and resources through observation, forming a hypothesis, testing the hypothesis in a reproducible manner, analyzing and drawing conclusions from the data, publishing the results, and anticipating further development when future researchers respond to and retest findings. An appropriate starting point in this case might be the question "What do fans of Jimmy Buffett seek that drives them to attend his concerts faithfully?"

As you begin to think like a sociologist, you may notice that you have tapped into your observation skills. You might assume that your observations and insights are valuable and accurate. But the results of casual observation are limited by the fact that there is no standardization—who is to say one person's observation of an event is any more accurate than another's? To mediate these concerns, sociologists rely on systematic research processes.

Glossary

empirical evidence

evidence corroborated by direct experience and/or observation.

Approaches to Sociological Research

- Define and describe the scientific method
- Explain how the scientific method is used in sociological research
- Understand the function and importance of an interpretive framework
- Define what reliability and validity mean in a research study

When sociologists apply the sociological perspective and begin to ask questions, no topic is off limits. Every aspect of human behavior is a source of possible investigation. Sociologists question the world that humans have created and live in. They notice patterns of behavior as people move through that world. Using sociological methods and systematic research within the framework of the scientific method and a scholarly interpretive perspective, sociologists have discovered workplace patterns that have transformed industries, family patterns that have enlightened parents, and education patterns that have aided structural changes in classrooms.

The students at that college cafeteria discussion put forth a few loosely stated opinions. If the human behaviors around those claims were tested systematically, a student could write a report and offer the findings to fellow sociologists and the world in general. The new perspective could help people understand themselves and their neighbors and help people make better decisions about their lives. It might seem strange to use scientific practices to study social trends, but, as we shall see, it's extremely helpful to rely on systematic approaches that research methods provide.

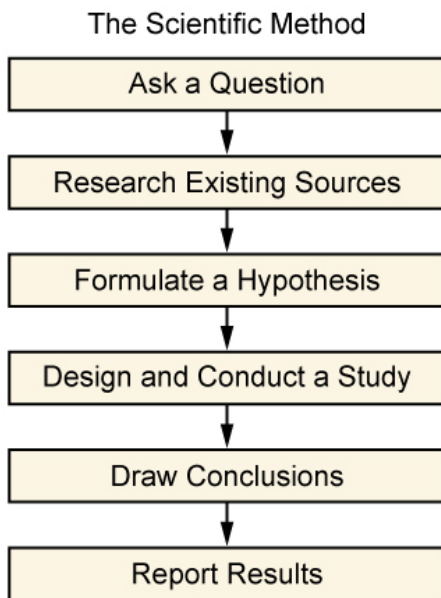
Sociologists often begin the research process by asking a question about how or why things happen in this world. It might be a unique question about a new trend or an old question about a common aspect of life. Once a question is formed, a sociologist proceeds through an in-depth process to answer it. In deciding how to design that process, the researcher may adopt a scientific approach or an interpretive framework. The following sections describe these approaches to knowledge.

The Scientific Method

Sociologists make use of tried and true methods of research, such as experiments, surveys, and field research. But humans and their social interactions are so diverse that they can seem impossible to chart or explain. It might seem that science is about discoveries and chemical reactions or about proving ideas right or wrong rather than about exploring the nuances of human behavior.

However, this is exactly why scientific models work for studying human behavior. A scientific process of research establishes parameters that help make sure results are objective and accurate. Scientific methods provide limitations and boundaries that focus a study and organize its results.

The scientific method involves developing and testing theories about the world based on empirical evidence. It is defined by its commitment to systematic observation of the empirical world and strives to be objective, critical, skeptical, and logical. It involves a series of prescribed steps that have been established over centuries of scholarship.



The scientific method is an essential tool in research.

But just because sociological studies use scientific methods does not make the results less human. Sociological topics are not reduced to right or wrong facts. In this field, results of studies tend to provide people with access to knowledge they did not have before—knowledge of other cultures, knowledge of rituals and beliefs, knowledge of trends and attitudes. No matter what research approach is used, researchers want to maximize the study's **reliability** (how likely research results are to be replicated if the study is reproduced). Reliability increases the likelihood that what happens to one person will happen to all people in a group. Researchers also strive for **validity**, which refers to how well the study measures what it was designed to measure. Returning to the Disney World topic, reliability of a study would reflect how well the resulting experience represents the average experience of theme park-goers. Validity would ensure that the study's design accurately examined what it was designed to study, so an exploration of adults' interactions with costumed mascots should address that issue and not veer into other age groups' interactions with them or into adult interactions with staff or other guests.

In general, sociologists tackle questions about the role of social characteristics in outcomes. For example, how do different communities fare in terms of psychological well-being, community cohesiveness, range of vocation, wealth, crime rates, and so on? Are communities functioning smoothly? Sociologists look between the cracks to discover obstacles to meeting basic human needs. They might study environmental influences and patterns of behavior that lead to crime, substance abuse, divorce, poverty, unplanned pregnancies, or illness. And, because sociological studies are not all focused on negative behaviors or challenging situations, researchers might study vacation trends, healthy eating habits, neighborhood organizations, higher education patterns, games, parks, and exercise habits.

Sociologists can use the scientific method not only to collect but to interpret and analyze the data. They deliberately apply scientific logic and objectivity. They are interested in but not attached to the results. They work outside of their own political or social agenda. This doesn't mean

researchers do not have their own personalities, complete with preferences and opinions. But sociologists deliberately use the scientific method to maintain as much objectivity, focus, and consistency as possible in a particular study.

With its systematic approach, the scientific method has proven useful in shaping sociological studies. The scientific method provides a systematic, organized series of steps that help ensure objectivity and consistency in exploring a social problem. They provide the means for accuracy, reliability, and validity. In the end, the scientific method provides a shared basis for discussion and analysis (Merton 1963).

Typically, the scientific method starts with these steps—1) ask a question, 2) research existing sources, 3) formulate a hypothesis—described below.

Ask a Question

The first step of the scientific method is to ask a question, describe a problem, and identify the specific area of interest. The topic should be narrow enough to study within a geography and timeframe. “Are societies capable of sustained happiness?” would be too vague. The question should also be broad enough to have universal merit. “What do personal hygiene habits reveal about the values of students at XYZ High School?” would be too narrow. That said, happiness and hygiene are worthy topics to study. Sociologists do not rule out any topic, but would strive to frame these questions in better research terms.

That is why sociologists are careful to define their terms. In a hygiene study, for instance, hygiene could be defined as “personal habits to maintain physical appearance (as opposed to health),” and a researcher might ask, “How do differing personal hygiene habits reflect the cultural value placed on appearance?” When forming these basic research questions, sociologists develop an **operational definition**, that is, they define the concept in terms of the physical or concrete steps it takes to objectively measure it. The operational definition identifies an observable condition of the concept. By

operationalizing a variable of the concept, all researchers can collect data in a systematic or replicable manner.

The operational definition must be valid, appropriate, and meaningful. And it must be reliable, meaning that results will be close to uniform when tested on more than one person. For example, “good drivers” might be defined in many ways: those who use their turn signals, those who don’t speed, or those who courteously allow others to merge. But these driving behaviors could be interpreted differently by different researchers and could be difficult to measure. Alternatively, “a driver who has never received a traffic violation” is a specific description that will lead researchers to obtain the same information, so it is an effective operational definition.

Research Existing Sources

The next step researchers undertake is to conduct background research through a **literature review**, which is a review of any existing similar or related studies. A visit to the library and a thorough online search will uncover existing research about the topic of study. This step helps researchers gain a broad understanding of work previously conducted on the topic at hand and enables them to position their own research to build on prior knowledge. Researchers—including student researchers—are responsible for correctly citing existing sources they use in a study or that inform their work. While it is fine to borrow previously published material (as long as it enhances a unique viewpoint), it must be referenced properly and never plagiarized.

To study hygiene and its value in a particular society, a researcher might sort through existing research and unearth studies about child-rearing, vanity, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, and cultural attitudes toward beauty. It’s important to sift through this information and determine what is relevant. Using existing sources educates a researcher and helps refine and improve a study’s design.

Formulate a Hypothesis

A **hypothesis** is an assumption about how two or more variables are related; it makes a conjectural statement about the relationship between those variables. In sociology, the hypothesis will often predict how one form of human behavior influences another. In research, **independent variables** are the *cause* of the change. The **dependent variable** is the *effect*, or thing that is changed.

For example, in a basic study, the researcher would establish one form of human behavior as the independent variable and observe the influence it has on a dependent variable. How does gender (the independent variable) affect rate of income (the dependent variable)? How does one's religion (the independent variable) affect family size (the dependent variable)? How is social class (the dependent variable) affected by level of education (the independent variable)?

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
The greater the availability of affordable housing, the lower the homeless rate.	Affordable Housing	Homeless Rate
The greater the availability of math tutoring, the higher the math grades.	Math Tutoring	Math Grades
The greater the police patrol presence, the safer the neighborhood.	Police Patrol Presence	Safer Neighborhood

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
The greater the factory lighting, the higher the productivity.	Factory Lighting	Productivity
The greater the amount of observation, the higher the public awareness.	Observation	Public Awareness

Examples of Dependent and Independent Variables Typically, the independent variable causes the dependent variable to change in some way.

At this point, a researcher’s operational definitions help measure the variables. In a study asking how tutoring improves grades, for instance, one researcher might define “good” grades as a C or better, while another uses a B+ as a starting point for “good.” Another operational definition might describe “tutoring” as “one-on-one assistance by an expert in the field, hired by an educational institution.” Those definitions set limits and establish cut-off points, ensuring consistency and replicability in a study.

As the chart shows, an independent variable is the one that causes a dependent variable to change. For example, a researcher might hypothesize that teaching children proper hygiene (the independent variable) will boost their sense of self-esteem (the dependent variable). Or rephrased, a child’s sense of self-esteem depends, in part, on the quality and availability of hygienic resources.

Of course, this hypothesis can also work the other way around. Perhaps a sociologist believes that increasing a child’s sense of self-esteem (the independent variable) will automatically increase or improve habits of hygiene (now the dependent variable). Identifying the independent and dependent variables is very important. As the hygiene example shows, simply identifying two topics, or variables, is not enough: Their prospective relationship must be part of the hypothesis.

Just because a sociologist forms an educated prediction of a study's outcome doesn't mean data contradicting the hypothesis aren't welcome. Sociologists analyze general patterns in response to a study, but they are equally interested in exceptions to patterns. In a study of education, a researcher might predict that high school dropouts have a hard time finding a rewarding career. While it has become at least a cultural assumption that the higher the education, the higher the salary and degree of career happiness, there are certainly exceptions. People with little education have had stunning careers, and people with advanced degrees have had trouble finding work. A sociologist prepares a hypothesis knowing that results will vary.

Once the preliminary work is done, it's time for the next research steps: designing and conducting a study, and drawing conclusions. These research methods are discussed below.

Interpretive Framework

While many sociologists rely on the scientific method as a research approach, others operate from an **interpretive framework**. While systematic, this approach doesn't follow the hypothesis-testing model that seeks to find generalizable results. Instead, an *interpretive framework*, sometimes referred to as an interpretive perspective, seeks to understand social worlds from the point of view of participants, leading to in-depth knowledge.

Interpretive research is generally more descriptive or narrative in its findings. Rather than formulating a hypothesis and method for testing it, an interpretive researcher will develop approaches to explore the topic at hand that may involve lots of direct observation or interaction with subjects. This type of researcher also learns as he or she proceeds, sometimes adjusting the research methods or processes midway to optimize findings as they evolve.

Summary

Using the scientific method, a researcher conducts a study in five phases: asking a question, researching existing sources, formulating a hypothesis, conducting a study, and drawing conclusions. The scientific method is useful in that it provides a clear method of organizing a study. Some sociologists conduct research through an interpretive framework rather than employing the scientific method.

Scientific sociological studies often observe relationships between variables. Researchers study how one variable changes another. Prior to conducting a study, researchers are careful to apply operational definitions to their terms and to establish dependent and independent variables.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

A measurement is considered _____ if it actually measures what it is intended to measure, according to the topic of the study.

- a. reliable
- b. sociological
- c. valid
- d. quantitative

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

Sociological studies test relationships in which change in one _____ causes change in another.

- a. test subject
 - b. behavior
 - c. variable
 - d. operational definition
-

Solution:
Answers

C

Exercise:

Problem:

In a study, a group of 10-year-old boys are fed doughnuts every morning for a week and then weighed to see how much weight they gained. Which factor is the dependent variable?

- a. The doughnuts
 - b. The boys
 - c. The duration of a week
 - d. The weight gained
-

Solution:
Answers

D

Exercise:

Problem:

Which statement provides the best operational definition of “childhood obesity”?

- a. Children who eat unhealthy foods and spend too much time watching television and playing video games

- b. A distressing trend that can lead to health issues including type 2 diabetes and heart disease
 - c. Body weight at least 20% higher than a healthy weight for a child of that height
 - d. The tendency of children today to weigh more than children of earlier generations
-

Solution:

Answers

C

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Write down the first three steps of the scientific method. Think of a broad topic that you are interested in and which would make a good sociological study—for example, ethnic diversity in a college, homecoming rituals, athletic scholarships, or teen driving. Now, take that topic through the first steps of the process. For each step, write a few sentences or a paragraph: 1) Ask a question about the topic. 2) Do some research and write down the titles of some articles or books you'd want to read about the topic. 3) Formulate a hypothesis.

Further Research

For a historical perspective on the scientific method in sociology, read “The Elements of Scientific Method in Sociology” by F. Stuart Chapin (1914) in the *American Journal of Sociology*: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Method-in-Sociology>.

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“Scientific Method Lab,” the University of Utah, http://aspire.cosmic-ray.org/labs/scientific_method/sci_method_main.html

Glossary

dependent variables

changed by other variables

hypothesis

an educated guess with predicted outcomes about the relationship between two or more variables

independent variables

cause changes in dependent variables

interpretive framework

a sociological research approach that seeks in-depth understanding of a topic or subject through observation or interaction; this approach is not based on hypothesis testing

literature review

a scholarly research step that entails identifying and studying all existing studies on a topic to create a basis for new research

operational definitions

specific explanations of abstract concepts that a researcher plans to study

reliability

a measure of a study’s consistency that considers how likely results are to be replicated if a study is reproduced

scientific method

an established scholarly research method that involves asking a question, researching existing sources, forming a hypothesis, designing and conducting a study, and drawing conclusions

validity

the degree to which a sociological measure accurately reflects the topic of study

Research Methods

- Differentiate between four kinds of research methods: surveys, field research, experiments, and secondary data analysis
- Understand why different topics are better suited to different research approaches

Sociologists examine the world, see a problem or interesting pattern, and set out to study it. They use research methods to design a study—perhaps a detailed, systematic, scientific method for conducting research and obtaining data, or perhaps an ethnographic study utilizing an interpretive framework. Planning the research design is a key step in any sociological study.

When entering a particular social environment, a researcher must be careful. There are times to remain anonymous and times to be overt. There are times to conduct interviews and times to simply observe. Some participants need to be thoroughly informed; others should not know they are being observed. A researcher wouldn't stroll into a crime-ridden neighborhood at midnight, calling out, "Any gang members around?" And if a researcher walked into a coffee shop and told the employees they would be observed as part of a study on work efficiency, the self-conscious, intimidated baristas might not behave naturally.

In the 1920s, leaders of a Chicago factory called Hawthorne Works commissioned a study to determine whether or not lighting could increase or decrease worker productivity. Sociologists were brought in. Changes were made. Productivity increased. Results were published.

But when the study was over, productivity dropped again. Why did this happen? In 1953, Henry A. Landsberger analyzed the study results to answer this question. He realized that employee productivity increased because sociologists were paying attention to them. The sociologists' presence influenced the study results. Worker behaviors were altered not by the lighting but by the study itself. From this, sociologists learned the importance of carefully planning their roles as part of their research design (Franke and Kaul 1978).

Landsberger called the workers' response the **Hawthorne effect**—people changing their behavior because they know they are being watched as part of a study. The Hawthorne effect is unavoidable in some research. In many cases, sociologists have to make the purpose of the study known. Subjects must be aware that they are being observed, and a certain amount of artificiality may result (Sonnenfeld 1985).

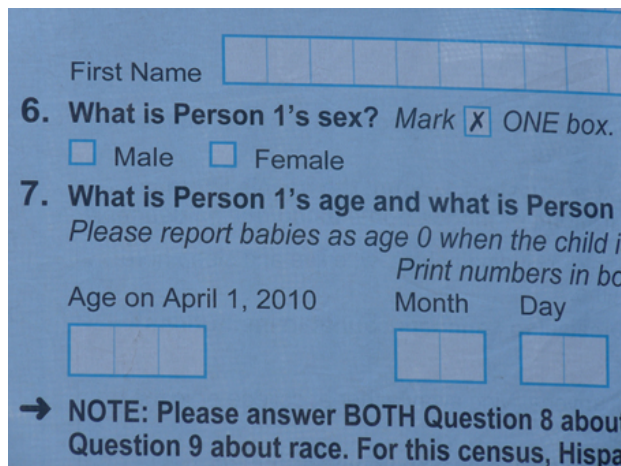
Making sociologists' presence invisible is not always realistic for other reasons. That option is not available to a researcher studying prison behaviors, early education, or the Ku Klux Klan. Researchers can't just stroll into prisons, kindergarten classrooms,

or Klan meetings and unobtrusively observe behaviors. In situations like these, other methods are needed. All studies shape the research design, while research design simultaneously shapes the study. Researchers choose methods that best suit their study topic and that fit with their overall approach to research.

In planning a study's design, sociologists generally choose from four widely used methods of social investigation: survey, field research, experiment, and secondary data analysis (or use of existing sources). Every research method comes with pluses and minuses, and the topic of study strongly influences which method or methods are put to use.

Surveys

As a research method, a **survey** collects data from subjects who respond to a series of questions about behaviors and opinions, often in the form of a questionnaire. The survey is one of the most widely used scientific research methods. The standard survey format allows individuals a level of anonymity in which they can express personal ideas.



The image shows a portion of a questionnaire form. At the top, there is a label "First Name" followed by a long, empty rectangular box. Below this, question 6 asks "What is Person 1's sex?" with the instruction "Mark ONE box." There are two checkboxes: "Male" and "Female". Question 7 asks "What is Person 1's age and what is Person 1's sex?" with the instruction "Please report babies as age 0 when the child is under 1 year old." Below this, there are three input fields: "Age on April 1, 2010" (a three-digit box), "Month" (a two-digit box), and "Day" (a two-digit box). At the bottom, there is a note: "→ NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 8 about... Question 9 about race. For this census, Hispa..."

Questionnaires are a common research method; the U.S. Census is a well-known example. (Photo courtesy of Karen Horton/flickr)

At some point or another, everyone responds to some type of survey. The United States Census is an excellent example of a large-scale survey intended to gather sociological

data. Customers fill out questionnaires at stores or promotional events, responding to questions such as “How did you hear about the event?” and “Were the staff helpful?” You’ve probably picked up the phone and heard a caller ask you to participate in a political poll or similar type of survey. “Do you eat hot dogs? If yes, how many per month?”

Not all surveys would be considered sociological research. Marketing polls help companies refine marketing goals and strategies; they are generally not conducted as part of a scientific study, meaning they are not designed to test a hypothesis or to contribute knowledge to the field of sociology. The results are not published in a refereed scholarly journal, where design, methodology, results, and analyses are vetted. Often, polls on TV do not reflect a general population, but are merely answers from a specific show’s audience. Polls conducted by programs such as *American Idol* or *So You Think You Can Dance* represent the opinions of fans but are not particularly scientific. A good contrast to these are the Nielsen Ratings, which determine the popularity of television programming through scientific market research.



As part of a malaria pill study, U.S. Navy Hospital personnel complete a questionnaire on health issues they experienced in Somalia.

Participants submitted a blood sample as part of this study, which supported Operation Restore Hope.

(Photo courtesy of
ExpertInfantry.com/flickr)

Sociologists conduct surveys under controlled conditions for specific purposes. Surveys gather different types of information from people. While surveys are not great at capturing the ways people really behave in social situations, they are a great method for discovering how people feel and think—or at least how they say they feel and think. Surveys can track preferences for presidential candidates or reported individual behaviors (such as sleeping, driving, or texting habits), or factual information such as employment status, income, and education levels.

A survey targets a specific **population**, people who are the focus of a study, such as college athletes, international students, or teenagers living with type 1 (juvenile-onset) diabetes. Most researchers choose to survey a small sector of the population, or a **sample**: that is, a manageable number of subjects who *represent* a larger population. The success of a study depends on how well a population is represented by the sample. In a **random sample**, every person in a population has the same chance of being chosen for the study. According to the laws of probability, random samples represent the population as a whole. For instance, a Gallup Poll, if conducted as a nationwide random sampling, should be able to provide an accurate estimate of public opinion whether it contacts 2,000 or 10,000 people.

After selecting subjects, the researcher develops a specific plan to ask questions and record responses. It is important to inform subjects of the nature and purpose of the study up front. If they agree to participate, researchers thank subjects and offer them a chance to see the results of the study if they are interested. The researcher presents the subjects with an instrument, a means of gathering the information. A common instrument is a questionnaire, in which subjects answer a series of questions. For some topics, the researcher might ask yes-or-no or multiple-choice questions, allowing subjects to choose possible responses to each question. This kind of **quantitative data**—research collected in numerical form that can be counted—are easy to tabulate. Just count up the number of “yes” and “no” responses or correct answers and chart them into percentages.

Questionnaires can also ask more complex questions with more complex answers—beyond “yes,” “no,” or the option next to a checkbox. In those cases, the answers are subjective, varying from person to person. *How do you plan to use your college education? Why do you follow Jimmy Buffett around the country and attend every concert?* Those types of questions require short essay responses, and participants willing to take the time to write those answers will convey personal information about religious beliefs, political views, and morals. Some topics that reflect internal thought are impossible to observe directly and are difficult to discuss honestly in a public forum. People are more likely to share honest answers if they can respond to questions anonymously. This type of information is **qualitative data**—results that are subjective and often based on what is seen in a natural setting. Qualitative information is harder to organize and tabulate. The researcher will end up with a wide range of responses, some of

which may be surprising. The benefit of written opinions, though, is the wealth of material that they provide.

An **interview** is a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the subject, and is a way of conducting surveys on a topic. Interviews are similar to the short answer questions on surveys in that the researcher asks subjects a series of questions. However, participants are free to respond as they wish, without being limited by predetermined choices. In the back-and-forth conversation of an interview, a researcher can ask for clarification, spend more time on a subtopic, or ask additional questions. In an interview, a subject will ideally feel free to open up and answer questions that are often complex. There are no right or wrong answers. The subject might not even know how to answer the questions honestly.

Questions such as “How did society's view of alcohol consumption influence your decision whether or not to take your first sip of alcohol?” or “Did you feel that the divorce of your parents would put a social stigma on your family?” involve so many factors that the answers are difficult to categorize. A researcher needs to avoid steering or prompting the subject to respond in a specific way; otherwise, the results will prove to be unreliable. And, obviously, a sociological interview is not an interrogation. The researcher will benefit from gaining a subject’s trust, from empathizing or commiserating with a subject, and from listening without judgment.

Field Research

The work of sociology rarely happens in limited, confined spaces. Sociologists seldom study subjects in their own offices or laboratories. Rather, sociologists go out into the world. They meet subjects where they live, work, and play. **Field research** refers to gathering **primary data** from a natural environment without doing a lab experiment or a survey. It is a research method suited to an interpretive framework rather than to the scientific method. To conduct field research, the sociologist must be willing to step into new environments and observe, participate, or experience those worlds. In field work, the sociologists, rather than the subjects, are the ones out of their element.

The researcher interacts with or observes a person or people, gathering data along the way. The key point in field research is that it takes place in the subject’s natural environment, whether it’s a coffee shop or tribal village, a homeless shelter or the DMV, a hospital, airport, mall, or beach resort.



Photo Courtesy of Olympic National Park

Sociological researchers travel across countries and cultures to interact with and observe subjects in their natural environments. (Photo courtesy of IMLS Digital Collections and Content/flickr and Olympic National Park)

While field research often begins in a specific *setting*, the study's purpose is to observe specific *behaviors* in that setting. Field work is optimal for observing *how* people behave. It is less useful, however, for understanding *why* they behave that way. You can't really narrow down cause and effect when there are so many variables floating around in a natural environment.

Much of the data gathered in field research are based not on cause and effect but on **correlation**. And while field research looks for correlation, its small sample size does not allow for establishing a causal relationship between two variables.

Note:

Parrotheads as Sociological Subjects



Business suits for the day job are replaced by leis and T-shirts for a Jimmy Buffett concert. (Photo courtesy of Sam Howzitt/flickr)

Some sociologists study small groups of people who share an identity in one aspect of their lives. Almost everyone belongs to a group of like-minded people who share an interest or hobby. Scientologists, folk dancers, or members of Mensa (an organization for people with exceptionally high IQs) express a specific part of their identity through their affiliation with a group. Those groups are often of great interest to sociologists.

Jimmy Buffett, an American musician who built a career from his single top-10 song “Margaritaville,” has a following of devoted groupies called Parrotheads. Some of them have taken fandom to the extreme, making Parrothead culture a lifestyle. In 2005, Parrotheads and their subculture caught the attention of researchers John Mihelich and John Papineau. The two saw the way Jimmy Buffett fans collectively created an artificial reality. They wanted to know how fan groups shape culture. The result was a study and resulting article called “Parrotheads in Margaritaville: Fan Practice, Oppositional Culture, and Embedded Cultural Resistance in Buffett Fandom.”

What Mihelich and Papineau found was that Parrotheads, for the most part, do not seek to challenge or even change society, as many sub-groups do. In fact, most Parrotheads live successfully within society, holding upper-level jobs in the corporate world. What they seek is escape from the stress of daily life. They get it from Jimmy Buffett’s concerts and from the public image he projects. Buffett fans collectively keep their version of an alternate reality alive.

At Jimmy Buffett concerts, Parrotheads engage in a form of role play. They paint their faces and dress for the tropics in grass skirts, Hawaiian leis, and Parrot hats. These

fans don't generally play the part of Parrotheads outside of these concerts; you are not likely to see a lone Parrothead in a bank or library. In that sense, Parrothead culture is less about individualism and more about conformity. Being a Parrothead means sharing a specific identity. Parrotheads feel connected to each other: it's a group identity, not an individual one.

On fan websites, followers conduct polls calling for responses to message-board prompts such as "Why are you a Parrothead" and "Where is your Margaritaville?" To the latter question, fans define the place as anywhere from a beach to a bar to a peaceful state of mind. Ultimately, however, "Margaritaville" is an imaginary place. In their study, Mihelich and Papineau quote from a recent book by sociologist Richard Butsch, who writes, "un-self-conscious acts, if done by many people together, can produce change, even though the change may be unintended" (2000). Many Parrothead fan groups have performed good works in the name of Jimmy Buffett culture, donating to charities and volunteering their services.

However, the authors suggest that what really drives Parrothead culture is commercialism. Jimmy Buffett's popularity was dying out in the 1980s until being reinvigorated after he signed a sponsorship deal with a beer company. These days, his concert tours alone generate nearly \$30 million a year. Buffett made a lucrative career for himself by partnering with product companies and marketing Margaritaville in the form of T-shirts, restaurants, casinos, and an expansive line of products. Some fans accuse Buffett of selling out, while others admire his financial success. Buffett makes no secret of his commercial exploitations; from the stage, he's been known to tell his fans, "Just remember, I am spending your money foolishly."

Mihelich and Papineau gathered much of their information online. Referring to their study as a "Web ethnography," they collected extensive narrative material from fans who joined Parrothead clubs and posted their experiences on websites. "We do not claim to have conducted a complete ethnography of Parrothead fans, or even of the Parrothead Web activity," state the authors, "but we focused on particular aspects of Parrothead practice as revealed through Web research" (2005). Fan narratives gave them insight into how individuals identify with Buffett's world and how fans used popular music to cultivate personal and collective meaning.

In conducting studies about pockets of culture, most sociologists seek to discover a universal appeal. Mihelich and Papineau stated, "Although Parrotheads are a relative minority of the contemporary US population, an in-depth look at their practice and conditions illuminate [sic] cultural practices and conditions many of us experience and participate in" (2005).

Here, we will look at three types of field research: participant observation, ethnography, and the case study.

Participant Observation

In 2000, a comic writer named Rodney Rothman wanted an insider's view of white-collar work. He slipped into the sterile, high-rise offices of a New York "dot com" agency. Every day for two weeks, he pretended to work there. His main purpose was simply to see if anyone would notice him or challenge his presence. No one did. The receptionist greeted him. The employees smiled and said good morning. Rothman was accepted as part of the team. He even went so far as to claim a desk, inform the receptionist of his whereabouts, and attend a meeting. He published an article about his experience in *The New Yorker* called "My Fake Job" (2000). Later, he was discredited for allegedly fabricating some details of the story and *The New Yorker* issued an apology. However, Rothman's entertaining article still offered fascinating descriptions of the inside workings of a "dot com" company and exemplified the lengths to which a sociologist will go to uncover material.

Rothman had conducted a form of study called **participant observation**, in which researchers join people and participate in a group's routine activities for the purpose of observing them within that context. This method lets researchers experience a specific aspect of social life. A researcher might go to great lengths to get a firsthand look into a trend, institution, or behavior. Researchers temporarily put themselves into roles and record their observations. A researcher might work as a waitress in a diner, or live as a homeless person for several weeks, or ride along with police officers as they patrol their regular beat. Often, these researchers try to blend in seamlessly with the population they study, and they may not disclose their true identity or purpose if they feel it would compromise the results of their research.



Is she a working waitress or a sociologist conducting a study using participant observation? (Photo

courtesy of zoetnet/flickr)

At the beginning of a field study, researchers might have a question: “What really goes on in the kitchen of the most popular diner on campus?” or “What is it like to be homeless?” Participant observation is a useful method if the researcher wants to explore a certain environment from the inside.

Field researchers simply want to observe and learn. In such a setting, the researcher will be alert and open minded to whatever happens, recording all observations accurately. Soon, as patterns emerge, questions will become more specific, observations will lead to hypotheses, and hypotheses will guide the researcher in shaping data into results.

In a study of small-town America conducted by sociological researchers John S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, the team altered their purpose as they gathered data. They initially planned to focus their study on the role of religion in American towns. As they gathered observations, they realized that the effect of industrialization and urbanization was the more relevant topic of this social group. The Lynds did not change their methods, but they revised their purpose. This shaped the structure of *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture*, their published results (Lynd and Lynd 1959).

The Lynds were upfront about their mission. The townspeople of Muncie, Indiana, knew why the researchers were in their midst. But some sociologists prefer not to alert people to their presence. The main advantage of covert participant observation is that it allows the researcher access to authentic, natural behaviors of a group’s members. The challenge, however, is gaining access to a setting without disrupting the pattern of others’ behavior. Becoming an inside member of a group, organization, or subculture takes time and effort. Researchers must pretend to be something they are not. The process could involve role playing, making contacts, networking, or applying for a job.

Once inside a group, some researchers spend months or even years pretending to be one of the people they are observing. However, as observers, they cannot get too involved. They must keep their purpose in mind and apply the sociological perspective. That way, they illuminate social patterns that are often unrecognized. Because information gathered during participant observation is mostly qualitative, rather than quantitative, the end results are often descriptive or interpretive. The researcher might present findings in an article or book, describing what he or she witnessed and experienced.

This type of research is what journalist Barbara Ehrenreich conducted for her book *Nickel and Dimed*. One day over lunch with her editor, as the story goes, Ehrenreich

mentioned an idea. *How can people exist on minimum-wage work? How do low-income workers get by?* she wondered. *Someone should do a study.* To her surprise, her editor responded, *Why don't you do it?*

That's how Ehrenreich found herself joining the ranks of the working class. For several months, she left her comfortable home and lived and worked among people who lacked, for the most part, higher education and marketable job skills. Undercover, she applied for and worked minimum wage jobs as a waitress, a cleaning woman, a nursing home aide, and a retail chain employee. During her participant observation, she used only her income from those jobs to pay for food, clothing, transportation, and shelter.

She discovered the obvious, that it's almost impossible to get by on minimum wage work. She also experienced and observed attitudes many middle and upper class people never think about. She witnessed firsthand the treatment of working class employees. She saw the extreme measures people take to make ends meet and to survive. She described fellow employees who held two or three jobs, worked seven days a week, lived in cars, could not pay to treat chronic health conditions, got randomly fired, submitted to drug tests, and moved in and out of homeless shelters. She brought aspects of that life to light, describing difficult working conditions and the poor treatment that low-wage workers suffer.

Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America, the book she wrote upon her return to her real life as a well-paid writer, has been widely read and used in many college classrooms.



Field research happens in real locations. What type of environment do work spaces

foster? What would a sociologist discover after blending in? (Photo courtesy of drewzhrodague/flickr)

Ethnography

Ethnography is the extended observation of the social perspective and cultural values of an entire social setting. Ethnographies involve objective observation of an entire community.

The heart of an ethnographic study focuses on how subjects view their own social standing and how they understand themselves in relation to a community. An ethnographic study might observe, for example, a small American fishing town, an Inuit community, a village in Thailand, a Buddhist monastery, a private boarding school, or Disney World. These places all have borders. People live, work, study, or vacation within those borders. People are there for a certain reason and therefore behave in certain ways and respect certain cultural norms. An ethnographer would commit to spending a determined amount of time studying every aspect of the chosen place, taking in as much as possible.

A sociologist studying a tribe in the Amazon might watch the way villagers go about their daily lives and then write a paper about it. To observe a spiritual retreat center, an ethnographer might sign up for a retreat and attend as a guest for an extended stay, observe and record data, and collate the material into results.

Note:

The Making of *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture*

In 1924, a young married couple named Robert and Helen Lynd undertook an unprecedented ethnography: to apply sociological methods to the study of one US city in order to discover what “ordinary” Americans did and believed. Choosing Muncie, Indiana (population about 30,000), as their subject, they moved to the small town and lived there for eighteen months.

Ethnographers had been examining other cultures for decades—groups considered minority or outsider—like gangs, immigrants, and the poor. But no one had studied the so-called average American.

Recording interviews and using surveys to gather data, the Lynds did not sugarcoat or idealize American life (PBS). They objectively stated what they observed.

Researching existing sources, they compared Muncie in 1890 to the Muncie they observed in 1924. Most Muncie adults, they found, had grown up on farms but now lived in homes inside the city. From that discovery, the Lynds focused their study on the impact of industrialization and urbanization.

They observed that Muncie was divided into business class and working class groups. They defined business class as dealing with abstract concepts and symbols, while working class people used tools to create concrete objects. The two classes led different lives with different goals and hopes. However, the Lynds observed, mass production offered both classes the same amenities. Like wealthy families, the working class was now able to own radios, cars, washing machines, telephones, vacuum cleaners, and refrigerators. This was an emerging material new reality of the 1920s.

As the Lynds worked, they divided their manuscript into six sections: Getting a Living, Making a Home, Training the Young, Using Leisure, Engaging in Religious Practices, and Engaging in Community Activities. Each chapter included subsections such as “The Long Arm of the Job” and “Why Do They Work So Hard?” in the “Getting a Living” chapter.

When the study was completed, the Lynds encountered a big problem. The Rockefeller Foundation, which had commissioned the book, claimed it was useless and refused to publish it. The Lynds asked if they could seek a publisher themselves. *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* was not only published in 1929, but became an instant bestseller, a status unheard of for a sociological study. The book sold out six printings in its first year of publication, and has never gone out of print (PBS).

Nothing like it had ever been done before. *Middletown* was reviewed on the front page of the *New York Times*. Readers in the 1920s and 1930s identified with the citizens of Muncie, Indiana, but they were equally fascinated by the sociological methods and the use of scientific data to define ordinary Americans. The book was proof that social data was important—and interesting—to the American public.



A classroom in Muncie, Indiana, in 1917, five years before John and Helen Lynd began researching this “typical” American community.

(Photo courtesy of Don
O'Brien/flickr)

Case Study

Sometimes a researcher wants to study one specific person or event. A **case study** is an in-depth analysis of a single event, situation, or individual. To conduct a case study, a researcher examines existing sources like documents and archival records, conducts interviews, engages in direct observation, and even participant observation, if possible.

Researchers might use this method to study a single case of, for example, a foster child, drug lord, cancer patient, criminal, or rape victim. However, a major criticism of the case study as a method is that a developed study of a single case, while offering depth on a topic, does not provide enough evidence to form a generalized conclusion. In other words, it is difficult to make universal claims based on just one person, since one person does not verify a pattern. This is why most sociologists do not use case studies as a primary research method.

However, case studies are useful when the single case is unique. In these instances, a single case study can add tremendous knowledge to a certain discipline. For example, a feral child, also called “wild child,” is one who grows up isolated from human beings. Feral children grow up without social contact and language, elements crucial to a “civilized” child’s development. These children mimic the behaviors and movements of animals, and often invent their own language. There are only about one hundred cases of “feral children” in the world.

As you may imagine, a feral child is a subject of great interest to researchers. Feral children provide unique information about child development because they have grown up outside of the parameters of “normal” child development. And since there are very few feral children, the case study is the most appropriate method for researchers to use in studying the subject.

At age 3, a Ukrainian girl named Oxana Malaya suffered severe parental neglect. She lived in a shed with dogs, eating raw meat and scraps. Five years later, a neighbor called authorities and reported seeing a girl who ran on all fours, barking. Officials brought Oxana into society, where she was cared for and taught some human behaviors, but she never became fully socialized. She has been designated as unable to support herself and now lives in a mental institution (Grice 2011). Case studies like

this offer a way for sociologists to collect data that may not be collectable by any other method.

Experiments

You've probably tested personal social theories. "If I study at night and review in the morning, I'll improve my retention skills." Or, "If I stop drinking soda, I'll feel better." Cause and effect. If this, then that. When you test the theory, your results either prove or disprove your hypothesis.

One way researchers test social theories is by conducting an **experiment**, meaning they investigate relationships to test a hypothesis—a scientific approach.

There are two main types of experiments: lab-based experiments and natural or field experiments. In a lab setting, the research can be controlled so that perhaps more data can be recorded in a certain amount of time. In a natural or field-based experiment, the generation of data cannot be controlled but the information might be considered more accurate since it was collected without interference or intervention by the researcher.

As a research method, either type of sociological experiment is useful for testing *if-then* statements: *if* a particular thing happens, *then* another particular thing will result. To set up a lab-based experiment, sociologists create artificial situations that allow them to manipulate variables.

Classically, the sociologist selects a set of people with similar characteristics, such as age, class, race, or education. Those people are divided into two groups. One is the experimental group and the other is the control group. The experimental group is exposed to the independent variable(s) and the control group is not. To test the benefits of tutoring, for example, the sociologist might expose the experimental group of students to tutoring but not the control group. Then both groups would be tested for differences in performance to see if tutoring had an effect on the experimental group of students. As you can imagine, in a case like this, the researcher would not want to jeopardize the accomplishments of either group of students, so the setting would be somewhat artificial. The test would not be for a grade reflected on their permanent record, for example.

Note:

An Experiment in Action



Sociologist Frances Heussenstamm conducted an experiment to explore the correlation between traffic stops and race-based bumper stickers. This issue of racial profiling remains a hot-button topic today. (Photo courtesy of dwightsghost/flickr)

A real-life example will help illustrate the experiment process. In 1971, Frances Heussenstamm, a sociology professor at California State University at Los Angeles, had a theory about police prejudice. To test her theory she conducted an experiment. She chose fifteen students from three ethnic backgrounds: black, white, and Hispanic. She chose students who routinely drove to and from campus along Los Angeles freeway routes, and who'd had perfect driving records for longer than a year. Those were her independent variables—students, good driving records, same commute route.

Next, she placed a Black Panther bumper sticker on each car. That sticker, a representation of a social value, was the independent variable. In the 1970s, the Black Panthers were a revolutionary group actively fighting racism. Heussenstamm asked the students to follow their normal driving patterns. She wanted to see if seeming support of the Black Panthers would change how these good drivers were treated by the police patrolling the highways.

The first arrest, for an incorrect lane change, was made two hours after the experiment began. One participant was pulled over three times in three days. He quit the study. After seventeen days, the fifteen drivers had collected a total of thirty-three traffic citations. The experiment was halted. The funding to pay traffic fines had run out, and so had the enthusiasm of the participants (Heussenstamm 1971).

Secondary Data Analysis

While sociologists often engage in original research studies, they also contribute knowledge to the discipline through **secondary data analysis**. Secondary data don't result from firsthand research collected from primary sources, but are the already completed work of other researchers. Sociologists might study works written by historians, economists, teachers, or early sociologists. They might search through periodicals, newspapers, or magazines from any period in history.

Using available information not only saves time and money, but it can add depth to a study. Sociologists often interpret findings in a new way, a way that was not part of an author's original purpose or intention. To study how women were encouraged to act and behave in the 1960s, for example, a researcher might watch movies, television shows, and situation comedies from that period. Or to research changes in behavior and attitudes due to the emergence of television in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a sociologist would rely on new interpretations of secondary data. Decades from now, researchers will most likely conduct similar studies on the advent of mobile phones, the Internet, or Facebook.

Social scientists also learn by analyzing the research of a variety of agencies. Governmental departments and global groups, like the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics or the World Health Organization, publish studies with findings that are useful to sociologists. A public statistic like the foreclosure rate might be useful for studying the effects of the 2008 recession; a racial demographic profile might be compared with data on education funding to examine the resources accessible by different groups.

One of the advantages of secondary data is that it is **nonreactive** (or unobtrusive) research, meaning that it does not include direct contact with subjects and will not alter or influence people's behaviors. Unlike studies requiring direct contact with people, using previously published data doesn't require entering a population and the investment and risks inherent in that research process.

Using available data does have its challenges. Public records are not always easy to access. A researcher will need to do some legwork to track them down and gain access to records. To guide the search through a vast library of materials and avoid wasting time reading unrelated sources, sociologists employ **content analysis**, applying a systematic approach to record and value information gleaned from secondary data as they relate to the study at hand.

But, in some cases, there is no way to verify the accuracy of existing data. It is easy to count how many drunk drivers, for example, are pulled over by the police. But how many are not? While it's possible to discover the percentage of teenage students who

drop out of high school, it might be more challenging to determine the number who return to school or get their GED later.

Another problem arises when data are unavailable in the exact form needed or do not include the precise angle the researcher seeks. For example, the average salaries paid to professors at a public school is public record. But the separate figures don't necessarily reveal how long it took each professor to reach the salary range, what their educational backgrounds are, or how long they've been teaching.

To write some of his books, sociologist Richard Sennett used secondary data to shed light on current trends. In *The Craftsman* (2008), he studied the human desire to perform quality work, from carpentry to computer programming. He studied the line between craftsmanship and skilled manual labor. He also studied changes in attitudes toward craftsmanship that occurred not only during and after the Industrial Revolution, but also in ancient times. Obviously, he could not have firsthand knowledge of periods of ancient history; he had to rely on secondary data for part of his study.

When conducting content analysis, it is important to consider the date of publication of an existing source and to take into account attitudes and common cultural ideals that may have influenced the research. For example, Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd gathered research for their book *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* in the 1920s. Attitudes and cultural norms were vastly different then than they are now. Beliefs about gender roles, race, education, and work have changed significantly since then. At the time, the study's purpose was to reveal the truth about small American communities. Today, it is an illustration of 1920s attitudes and values.

Summary

Sociological research is a fairly complex process. As you can see, a lot goes into even a simple research design. There are many steps and much to consider when collecting data on human behavior, as well as in interpreting and analyzing data in order to form conclusive results. Sociologists use scientific methods for good reason. The scientific method provides a system of organization that helps researchers plan and conduct the study while ensuring that data and results are reliable, valid, and objective.

The many methods available to researchers—including experiments, surveys, field studies, and secondary data analysis—all come with advantages and disadvantages. The strength of a study can depend on the choice and implementation of the appropriate method of gathering research. Depending on the topic, a study might use a single method or a combination of methods. It is important to plan a research design before undertaking a study. The information gathered may in itself be surprising, and the study design should provide a solid framework in which to analyze predicted and unpredicted data.

Method	Implementation	Advantages	Challenges
Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires • Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yields many responses • Can survey a large sample • Quantitative data are easy to chart 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be time consuming • Can be difficult to encourage participant response • Captures what people think and believe but not necessarily how they behave in real life
Field Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation • Participant observation • Ethnography • Case study 	<p>Yields detailed, accurate real-life information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming • Data captures how people behave but not what they think and believe • Qualitative data is difficult to organize

Method	Implementation	Advantages	Challenges
Experiment	Deliberate manipulation of social customs and mores	Tests cause and effect relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hawthorne Effect • Ethical concerns about people's wellbeing
Secondary Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of government data (census, health, crime statistics) • Research of historic documents 	Makes good use of previous sociological information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data could be focused on a purpose other than yours • Data can be hard to find

Main Sociological Research Methods Sociological research methods have advantages and disadvantages.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: Which materials are considered secondary data?

- Photos and letters given to you by another person
- Books and articles written by other authors about their studies
- Information that you have gathered and now have included in your results
- Responses from participants whom you both surveyed and interviewed

Solution:
Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

What method did researchers John Mihelich and John Papineau use to study Parrotheads?

- a. Survey
- b. Experiment
- c. Ethnography
- d. Case study

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

Why is choosing a random sample an effective way to select participants?

- a. Participants do not know they are part of a study
- b. The researcher has no control over who is in the study
- c. It is larger than an ordinary sample
- d. Everyone has the same chance of being part of the study

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

What research method did John S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd mainly use in their *Middletown* study?

- a. Secondary data
- b. Survey
- c. Participant observation

d. Experiment

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem: Which research approach is best suited to the scientific method?

- a. Questionnaire
 - b. Case study
 - c. Ethnography
 - d. Secondary data analysis
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

The main difference between ethnography and other types of participant observation is:

- a. ethnography isn't based on hypothesis testing
 - b. ethnography subjects are unaware they're being studied
 - c. ethnographic studies always involve minority ethnic groups
 - d. there is no difference
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem: Which best describes the results of a case study?

- a. It produces more reliable results than other methods because of its depth
 - b. Its results are not generally applicable
 - c. It relies solely on secondary data analysis
 - d. All of the above
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Using secondary data is considered an unobtrusive or _____ research method.

- a. Non-reactive
 - b. non-participatory
 - c. non-restrictive
 - d. non-confrontive
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

What type of data do surveys gather? For what topics would surveys be the best research method? What drawbacks might you expect to encounter when using a survey? To explore further, ask a research question and write a hypothesis. Then create a survey of about six questions relevant to the topic. Provide a rationale for each question. Now define your population and create a plan for recruiting a random sample and administering the survey.

Exercise:

Problem:

Imagine you are about to do field research in a specific place for a set time. Instead of thinking about the topic of study itself, consider how you, as the researcher, will have to prepare for the study. What personal, social, and physical sacrifices will you have to make? How will you manage your personal effects? What organizational equipment and systems will you need to collect the data?

Exercise:**Problem:**

Create a brief research design about a topic in which you are passionately interested. Now write a letter to a philanthropic or grant organization requesting funding for your study. How can you describe the project in a convincing yet realistic and objective way? Explain how the results of your study will be a relevant contribution to the body of sociological work already in existence.

Further Research

For information on current real-world sociology experiments, visit:

<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Sociology-Experiments>

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Glossary

case study

in-depth analysis of a single event, situation, or individual

content analysis

applying a systematic approach to record and value information gleaned from secondary data as it relates to the study at hand

control group

an experimental group that is not exposed to the independent variable

correlation

when a change in one variable coincides with a change in another variable, but does not necessarily indicate causation

ethnography

observing a complete social setting and all that it entails

experiment

the testing of a hypothesis under controlled conditions

field research

gathering data from a natural environment without doing a lab experiment or a survey

Hawthorne effect

when study subjects behave in a certain manner due to their awareness of being observed by a researcher

interview

a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the subject

nonreactive research

using secondary data, does not include direct contact with subjects and will not alter or influence people's behaviors

participant observation

when a researcher immerses herself in a group or social setting in order to make observations from an "insider" perspective

population

a defined group serving as the subject of a study

primary data

data that are collected directly from firsthand experience

quantitative data

represent research collected in numerical form that can be counted

qualitative data

comprise information that is subjective and often based on what is seen in a natural setting

random sample

a study's participants being randomly selected to serve as a representation of a larger population

research design

a detailed, systematic method for conducting research and obtaining data

samples

small, manageable number of subjects that represent the population

secondary data analysis

using data collected by others but applying new interpretations

surveys

collect data from subjects who respond to a series of questions about behaviors and opinions, often in the form of a questionnaire

Ethical Concerns

- Understand why ethical standards exist
- Demonstrate awareness of the American Sociological Association's Code of Ethics
- Define value neutrality

Sociologists conduct studies to shed light on human behaviors. Knowledge is a powerful tool that can be used toward positive change. And while a sociologist's goal is often simply to uncover knowledge rather than to spur action, many people use sociological studies to help improve people's lives. In that sense, conducting a sociological study comes with a tremendous amount of responsibility. Like any researchers, sociologists must consider their ethical obligation to avoid harming subjects or groups while conducting their research.

The American Sociological Association, or ASA, is the major professional organization of sociologists in North America. The ASA is a great resource for students of sociology as well. The ASA maintains a **code of ethics**—formal guidelines for conducting sociological research—consisting of principles and ethical standards to be used in the discipline. It also describes procedures for filing, investigating, and resolving complaints of unethical conduct.

Practicing sociologists and sociology students have a lot to consider. Some of the guidelines state that researchers must try to be skillful and fair-minded in their work, especially as it relates to their human subjects. Researchers must obtain participants' informed consent, and inform subjects of the responsibilities and risks of research before they agree to partake. During a study, sociologists must ensure the safety of participants and immediately stop work if a subject becomes potentially endangered on any level.

Researchers are required to protect the privacy of research participants whenever possible. Even if pressured by authorities, such as police or courts, researchers are not ethically allowed to release confidential information. Researchers must make results available to other sociologists, must make public all sources of financial support, and must not accept

funding from any organization that might cause a conflict of interest or seek to influence the research results for its own purposes. The ASA's ethical considerations shape not only the study but also the publication of results.

Pioneer German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) identified another crucial ethical concern. Weber understood that personal values could distort the framework for disclosing study results. While he accepted that some aspects of research design might be influenced by personal values, he declared it was entirely inappropriate to allow personal values to shape the interpretation of the responses. Sociologists, he stated, must establish **value neutrality**, a practice of remaining impartial, without bias or judgment, during the course of a study and in publishing results (1949). Sociologists are obligated to disclose research findings without omitting or distorting significant data.

Is value neutrality possible? Many sociologists believe it is impossible to set aside personal values and retain complete objectivity. They caution readers, rather, to understand that sociological studies may, by necessity, contain a certain amount of value bias. It does not discredit the results but allows readers to view them as one form of truth rather than a singular fact. Some sociologists attempt to remain uncritical and as objective as possible when studying cultural institutions. Value neutrality does not mean having no opinions. It means striving to overcome personal biases, particularly subconscious biases, when analyzing data. It means avoiding skewing data in order to match a predetermined outcome that aligns with a particular agenda, such as a political or moral point of view. Investigators are ethically obligated to report results, even when they contradict personal views, predicted outcomes, or widely accepted beliefs.

Summary

Sociologists and sociology students must take ethical responsibility for any study they conduct. They must first and foremost guarantee the safety of their participants. Whenever possible, they must ensure that participants have been fully informed before consenting to be part of a study.

The ASA (American Sociological Association) maintains ethical guidelines that sociologists must take into account as they conduct research. The guidelines address conducting studies, properly using existing sources, accepting funding, and publishing results.

Sociologists must try to maintain value neutrality. They must gather and analyze data objectively, setting aside their personal preferences, beliefs, and opinions. They must report findings accurately, even if they contradict personal convictions.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: Which statement illustrates value neutrality?

- a. Obesity in children is obviously a result of parental neglect and, therefore, schools should take a greater role to prevent it
- b. In 2003, states like Arkansas adopted laws requiring elementary schools to remove soft drink vending machines from schools
- c. Merely restricting children's access to junk food at school is not enough to prevent obesity
- d. Physical activity and healthy eating are a fundamental part of a child's education

Solution:

Answers

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Which person or organization defined the concept of value neutrality?

- a. Institutional Review Board (IRB)

- b. Peter Rossi
 - c. American Sociological Association (ASA)
 - d. Max Weber
-

Solution:
Answers

D

Exercise:

Problem:

To study the effects of fast food on lifestyle, health, and culture, from which group would a researcher ethically be unable to accept funding?

- a. A fast-food restaurant
 - b. A nonprofit health organization
 - c. A private hospital
 - d. A governmental agency like Health and Social Services
-

Solution:
Answers

A

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Why do you think the ASA crafted such a detailed set of ethical principles? What type of study could put human participants at risk? Think of some examples of studies that might be harmful. Do you think that, in the name of sociology, some researchers might be tempted to cross boundaries that threaten human rights? Why?

Exercise:

Problem:

Would you willingly participate in a sociological study that could potentially put your health and safety at risk, but had the potential to help thousands or even hundreds of thousands of people? For example, would you participate in a study of a new drug that could cure diabetes or cancer, even if it meant great inconvenience and physical discomfort for you or possible permanent damage?

Further Research

Founded in 1905, the ASA is a non-profit organization located in Washington, DC, with a membership of 14,000 researchers, faculty members, students, and practitioners of sociology. Its mission is “to articulate policy and implement programs likely to have the broadest possible impact for sociology now and in the future.” Learn more about this organization at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ASA>.

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Glossary

code of ethics

a set of guidelines that the American Sociological Association has established to foster ethical research and professionally responsible scholarship in sociology

value neutrality

a practice of remaining impartial, without bias or judgment during the course of a study and in publishing results

Introduction to Culture class="introduction"

Graffiti's mix of colorful drawings, words, and symbols is a vibrant expression of culture—or, depending on one's viewpoint, a disturbing expression of the creator's lack of respect for a community's shared space.
(Photo courtesy of aikijuanma/flickr)



Are there rules for eating at McDonald's? Generally, we do not think about rules in a fast food restaurant, but if you look around one on a typical weekday, you will see people acting as if they were trained for the role of fast food customer. They stand in line, pick items from the colorful menus, swipe debit cards to pay, and wait to collect trays of food. After a quick meal, customers wad up their paper wrappers and toss them into garbage cans. Customers' movement through this fast food routine is orderly and predictable, even if no rules are posted and no officials direct the process.

If you want more insight into these unwritten rules, think about what would happen if you behaved according to some other standards. (You would be doing what sociologists call ethnomethodology: deliberately disrupting social norms in order to learn about them.) For example, call ahead for reservations, ask the cashier detailed questions about the food's ingredients or how it is prepared. Ask to have your meal served to you at your table. Or throw your trash on the ground as you leave. Chances are, you will elicit hostile responses from the restaurant employees and your fellow customers.

People have written entire books analyzing the significance of fast food customs. They examine the extensive, detailed physicality of fast food: the food itself, wrappers, bags, trays, those tiny ketchup packets, the tables and chairs, and even the restaurant building. Everything about a chain restaurant reflects **culture**, the beliefs and behaviors that a social group shares. Sociological analysis can be applied to every expression of culture, from sporting events to holidays, from education to transportation, from fashion to etiquette.

In everyday conversation, people rarely distinguish between the terms *culture* and *society*, but the terms have slightly different meanings, and the distinction is important to a sociologist. A **society** describes a group of people who share a community and a culture. By “community,” sociologists refer to a definable region—as small as a neighborhood (Brooklyn, or “the east side of town”), as large as a country (Ethiopia, the United States, or Nepal), or somewhere in between (in America, this might include someone who identifies with Southern or Midwestern society). To clarify, a culture represents the *beliefs and practices* of a group, while society represents the *people* who share those beliefs and practices. Neither society nor culture could exist without the other. In this chapter, we examine the relationship between culture and society in greater detail, paying special attention to the elements and forces that shape culture, including diversity and cultural changes. A final discussion touches on the different theoretical perspectives from which sociologists research culture.

Glossary

culture

shared beliefs, values, and practices

society

people who live in a definable community and who share a culture

What Is Culture?

- Differentiate between culture and society
- Explain material versus nonmaterial culture
- Discuss the concept of cultural universalism as it relates to society
- Compare and contrast ethnocentrism and xenocentrism

Humans are social creatures. Since the dawn of *Homo sapiens* nearly 250,000 years ago, people have grouped together into communities in order to survive. Living together, people form common habits and behaviors—from specific methods of childrearing to preferred techniques for obtaining food. In modern-day Paris, many people shop daily at outdoor markets to pick up what they need for their evening meal, buying cheese, meat, and vegetables from different specialty stalls. In the United States, the majority of people shop once a week at supermarkets, filling large carts to the brim. How would a Parisian perceive U.S. shopping behaviors that Americans take for granted?

Almost every human behavior, from shopping to marriage to expressions of feelings, is learned. In the United States, people tend to view marriage as a choice between two people, based on mutual feelings of love. In other nations and in other times, marriages have been arranged through an intricate process of interviews and negotiations between entire families, or in other cases, through a direct system such as a “mail order bride.” To someone raised in New York City, the marriage customs of a family from Nigeria may seem strange, or even wrong. Conversely, someone from a traditional Kolkata family might be perplexed with the idea of romantic love as the foundation for marriage lifelong commitment. In other words, the way in which people view marriage depends largely on what they have been taught.

Behavior based on learned customs is not a bad thing. Being familiar with unwritten rules helps people feel secure and “normal.” Most people want to live their daily lives confident that their behaviors will not be challenged or disrupted. But even an action as seemingly simple as commuting to work evidences a great deal of cultural propriety.



How would a visitor from suburban America act and feel on this crowded Tokyo train? (Photo courtesy of simonglucas/flickr)

Take the case of going to work on public transportation. Whether commuting in Dublin, Cairo, Mumbai, or San Francisco, many behaviors will be the same in all locations, but significant differences also arise between cultures. Typically, a passenger would find a marked bus stop or station, wait for his bus or train, pay an agent before or after boarding, and quietly take a seat if one is available. But when boarding a bus in Cairo, passengers might have to run, because buses there often do not come to a full stop to take on patrons. Dublin bus riders would be expected to extend an arm to indicate that they want the bus to stop for them. And when boarding a commuter train in Mumbai, passengers must squeeze into overstuffed cars amid a lot of pushing and shoving on the crowded platforms. That kind of behavior would be considered the height of rudeness in United States, but in Mumbai it reflects the daily challenges of getting around on a train system that is taxed to capacity.

In this example of commuting, culture consists of thoughts (expectations about personal space, for example) and tangible things (bus stops, trains, and seating capacity). **Material culture** refers to the objects or belongings of a group of people. Metro passes and bus tokens are part of material culture, as are automobiles, stores, and the physical structures where people worship. **Nonmaterial culture**, in contrast, consists of the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of a society. Material and nonmaterial aspects of culture are linked, and physical objects often symbolize cultural ideas. A metro pass is a material object, but it represents a form of nonmaterial culture, namely, capitalism, and the acceptance of paying for transportation. Clothing, hairstyles, and jewelry are part of material culture, but the appropriateness of wearing certain clothing for specific events reflects nonmaterial culture. A school building belongs to material culture, but the teaching methods and educational standards are part of education's nonmaterial culture. These material and nonmaterial aspects of culture can vary subtly from region to region. As people travel farther afield, moving from different regions to entirely different parts of the world, certain material and nonmaterial aspects of culture become dramatically unfamiliar. What happens when we encounter different cultures? As we interact with cultures other than our own, we become more aware of the differences and commonalities between others' worlds and our own.

Cultural Universals

Often, a comparison of one culture to another will reveal obvious differences. But all cultures also share common elements. **Cultural universals** are patterns or traits that are globally common to all societies. One example of a cultural universal is the family unit: every human society recognizes a family structure that regulates sexual reproduction and the care of children. Even so, how that family unit is defined and how it functions vary. In many Asian cultures, for example, family members from all generations commonly live together in one household. In these cultures, young adults will continue to live in the extended household family structure until they marry and join their spouse's household, or they may remain and raise their nuclear family within the extended family's homestead. In the United States, by contrast, individuals are expected to

leave home and live independently for a period before forming a family unit consisting of parents and their offspring.

Anthropologist George Murdock first recognized the existence of cultural universals while studying systems of kinship around the world. Murdock found that cultural universals often revolve around basic human survival, such as finding food, clothing, and shelter, or around shared human experiences, such as birth and death, or illness and healing. Through his research, Murdock identified other universals including language, the concept of personal names, and, interestingly, jokes. Humor seems to be a universal way to release tensions and create a sense of unity among people (Murdock 1949). Sociologists consider humor necessary to human interaction because it helps individuals navigate otherwise tense situations.

Note:

Is Music a Cultural Universal?

Imagine that you are sitting in a theater, watching a film. The movie opens with the heroine sitting on a park bench, a grim expression on her face. Cue the music. The first slow and mournful notes are played in a minor key. As the melody continues, the heroine turns her head and sees a man walking toward her. The music slowly gets louder, and the dissonance of the chords sends a prickle of fear running down your spine. You sense that the heroine is in danger.

Now imagine that you are watching the same movie, but with a different soundtrack. As the scene opens, the music is soft and soothing, with a hint of sadness. You see the heroine sitting on the park bench and sense her loneliness. Suddenly, the music swells. The woman looks up and sees a man walking toward her. The music grows fuller, and the pace picks up. You feel your heart rise in your chest. This is a happy moment.

Music has the ability to evoke emotional responses. In television shows, movies, even commercials, music elicits laughter, sadness, or fear. Are these types of musical cues cultural universals?

In 2009, a team of psychologists, led by Thomas Fritz of the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig, Germany, studied people's reactions to music they'd never heard (Fritz et al. 2009).

The research team traveled to Cameroon, Africa, and asked Mafa tribal members to listen to Western music. The tribe, isolated from Western culture, had never been exposed to Western culture and had no context or experience within which to interpret its music. Even so, as the tribal members listened to a Western piano piece, they were able to recognize three basic emotions: happiness, sadness, and fear. Music, it turns out, is a sort of universal language.

Researchers also found that music can foster a sense of wholeness within a group. In fact, scientists who study the evolution of language have concluded that originally language (an established component of group identity) and music were one (Darwin 1871). Additionally, since music is largely nonverbal, the sounds of music can cross societal boundaries more easily than words. Music allows people to make connections where language might be a more difficult barricade. As Fritz and his team found, music and the emotions it conveys can be cultural universals.

Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

Despite how much humans have in common, cultural differences are far more prevalent than cultural universals. For example, while all cultures have language, analysis of particular language structures and conversational etiquette reveal tremendous differences. In some Middle Eastern cultures, it is common to stand close to others in conversation. North Americans keep more distance, maintaining a large “personal space.” Even something as simple as eating and drinking varies greatly from culture to culture. If your professor comes into an early morning class holding a mug of liquid, what do you assume she is drinking? In the United States, it’s most likely filled with coffee, not Earl Grey tea, a favorite in England, or Yak Butter tea, a staple in Tibet.

The way cuisines vary across cultures fascinates many people. Some travelers pride themselves on their willingness to try unfamiliar foods, like celebrated food writer Anthony Bourdain, while others return home expressing gratitude for their native culture’s fare. Often, Americans express disgust at other cultures’ cuisine, thinking it’s gross to eat meat

from a dog or guinea pig, for example, while they don't question their own habit of eating cows or pigs. Such attitudes are an example of **ethnocentrism**, or evaluating and judging another culture based on how it compares to one's own cultural norms. Ethnocentrism, as sociologist William Graham Sumner (1906) described the term, involves a belief or attitude that one's own culture is better than all others. Almost everyone is a little bit ethnocentric. For example, Americans tend to say that people from England drive on the "wrong" side of the road, rather than the "other" side. Someone from a country where dog meat is standard fare might find it off-putting to see a dog in a French restaurant—not on the menu, but as a pet and patron's companion.

A high level of appreciation for one's own culture can be healthy; a shared sense of community pride, for example, connects people in a society. But ethnocentrism can lead to disdain or dislike for other cultures, causing misunderstanding and conflict. People with the best intentions sometimes travel to a society to "help" its people, seeing them as uneducated or backward; essentially inferior. In reality, these travelers are guilty of **cultural imperialism**, the deliberate imposition of one's own cultural values on another culture. Europe's colonial expansion, begun in the 16th century, was often accompanied by a severe cultural imperialism. European colonizers often viewed the people in the lands they colonized as uncultured savages who were in need of European governance, dress, religion, and other cultural practices. A more modern example of cultural imperialism may include the work of international aid agencies who introduce agricultural methods and plant species from developed countries while overlooking indigenous varieties and agricultural approaches that are better suited to the particular region.

Ethnocentrism can be so strong that when confronted with all the differences of a new culture, one may experience disorientation and frustration. In sociology, we call this **culture shock**. A traveler from Chicago might find the nightly silence of rural Montana unsettling, not peaceful. An exchange student from China might be annoyed by the constant interruptions in class as other students ask questions—a practice that is considered rude in China. Perhaps the Chicago traveler was initially captivated with Montana's quiet beauty and the Chinese student was

originally excited to see an American-style classroom firsthand. But as they experience unanticipated differences from their own culture, their excitement gives way to discomfort and doubts about how to behave appropriately in the new situation. Eventually, as people learn more about a culture, they recover from culture shock.

Culture shock may appear because people aren't always expecting cultural differences. Anthropologist Ken Barger (1971) discovered this when conducting participatory observation in an Inuit community in the Canadian Arctic. Originally from Indiana, Barger hesitated when invited to join a local snowshoe race. He knew he'd never hold his own against these experts. Sure enough, he finished last, to his mortification. But the tribal members congratulated him, saying, "You really tried!" In Barger's own culture, he had learned to value victory. To the Inuit people, winning was enjoyable, but their culture valued survival skills essential to their environment: how hard someone tried could mean the difference between life and death. Over the course of his stay, Barger participated in caribou hunts, learned how to take shelter in winter storms, and sometimes went days with little or no food to share among tribal members. Trying hard and working together, two nonmaterial values, were indeed much more important than winning.

During his time with the Inuit tribe, Barger learned to engage in cultural relativism. **Cultural relativism** is the practice of assessing a culture by its own standards rather than viewing it through the lens of one's own culture. Practicing cultural relativism requires an open mind and a willingness to consider, and even adapt to, new values and norms. However, indiscriminately embracing everything about a new culture is not always possible. Even the most culturally relativist people from egalitarian societies—ones in which women have political rights and control over their own bodies—would question whether the widespread practice of female genital mutilation in countries such as Ethiopia and Sudan should be accepted as a part of cultural tradition. Sociologists attempting to engage in cultural relativism, then, may struggle to reconcile aspects of their own culture with aspects of a culture they are studying.

Sometimes when people attempt to rectify feelings of ethnocentrism and develop cultural relativism, they swing too far to the other end of the spectrum. **Xenocentrism** is the opposite of ethnocentrism, and refers to the belief that another culture is superior to one's own. (The Greek root word *xeno*, pronounced "ZEE-no," means "stranger" or "foreign guest.") An exchange student who goes home after a semester abroad or a sociologist who returns from the field may find it difficult to associate with the values of their own culture after having experienced what they deem a more upright or nobler way of living.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for sociologists studying different cultures is the matter of keeping a perspective. It is impossible for anyone to keep all cultural biases at bay; the best we can do is strive to be aware of them. Pride in one's own culture doesn't have to lead to imposing its values on others. And an appreciation for another culture shouldn't preclude individuals from studying it with a critical eye.

Note:

Overcoming Culture Shock

During her summer vacation, Caitlin flew from Chicago to Madrid to visit Maria, the exchange student she'd befriended the previous semester. In the airport, she heard rapid, musical Spanish being spoken all around her. Exciting as it was, she felt isolated and disconnected. Maria's mother kissed Caitlin on both cheeks when she greeted her. Her imposing father kept his distance. Caitlin was half asleep by the time supper was served—at 10 pm! Maria's family sat at the table for hours, speaking loudly, gesturing, and arguing about politics, a taboo dinner subject in Caitlin's house. They served wine and toasted their honored guest. Caitlin had trouble interpreting her hosts' facial expressions, and didn't realize she should make the next toast. That night, Caitlin crawled into a strange bed, wishing she hadn't come. She missed her home and felt overwhelmed by the new customs, language, and surroundings. She'd studied Spanish in school for years—why hadn't it prepared her for this? What Caitlin hadn't realized was that people depend not only on spoken words, but on subtle cues like gestures and facial expressions, to

communicate. Cultural norms accompany even the smallest nonverbal signals (DuBois 1951). They help people know when to shake hands, where to sit, how to converse, and even when to laugh. We relate to others through a shared set of cultural norms, and ordinarily, we take them for granted.

For this reason, culture shock is often associated with traveling abroad, although it can happen in one's own country, state, or even hometown. Anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1960) is credited with first coining the term "culture shock." In his studies, Oberg found that most people found encountering a new culture to be exciting at first. But bit by bit, they became stressed by interacting with people from a different culture who spoke another language and used different regional expressions. There was new food to digest, new daily schedules to follow, and new rules of etiquette to learn. Living with this constant stress can make people feel incompetent and insecure. People react to frustration in a new culture, Oberg found, by initially rejecting it and glorifying one's own culture. An American visiting Italy might long for a "real" pizza or complain about the unsafe driving habits of Italians compared to people in the United States. It helps to remember that culture is learned. Everyone is ethnocentric to an extent, and identifying with one's own country is natural.

Caitlin's shock was minor compared to that of her friends Dayar and Mahlika, a Turkish couple living in married student housing on campus. And it was nothing like that of her classmate Sanai. Sanai had been forced to flee war torn Bosnia with her family when she was fifteen. After two weeks in Spain, Caitlin had developed a bit more compassion and understanding for what those people had gone through. She understood that adjusting to a new culture takes time. It can take weeks or months to recover from culture shock, and years to fully adjust to living in a new culture.

By the end of Caitlin's trip, she'd made new lifelong friends. She'd stepped out of her comfort zone. She'd learned a lot about Spain, but she'd also discovered a lot about herself and her own culture.



Experiencing new cultures offers an opportunity to practice cultural relativism. (Photo courtesy of OledSidorenko/flickr)

Summary

Though “society” and “culture” are often used interchangeably, they have different meanings. A society is a group of people sharing a community and culture. Culture generally describes the shared behaviors and beliefs of these people, and includes material and nonmaterial elements.. Our experience of cultural difference is influenced by our ethnocentrism and xenocentrism. Sociologists try to practice cultural relativism.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

The terms _____ and _____ are often used interchangeably, but have nuances that differentiate them.

- a. imperialism and relativism
- b. culture and society
- c. society and ethnocentrism
- d. ethnocentrism and xenocentrism

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

The American flag is a material object that denotes the United States of America; however, there are certain connotations that many associate with the flag, like bravery and freedom. In this example, what are bravery and freedom?

- a. Symbols
- b. Language
- c. Material culture
- d. Nonmaterial culture

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

The belief that one's culture is inferior to another culture is called:

- a. ethnocentrism
 - b. nationalism
 - c. xenocentrism
 - d. imperialism
-

Solution:**Answer**

C

Exercise:**Problem:**

Rodney and Elise are American students studying abroad in Italy. When they are introduced to their host families, the families kiss them on both cheeks. When Rodney's host brother introduces himself and kisses Rodney on both cheeks, Rodney pulls back in surprise. Where he is from, unless they are romantically involved, men do not kiss one another. This is an example of:

- a. culture shock
 - b. imperialism
 - c. ethnocentrism
 - d. xenocentrism
-

Solution:**Answer**

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Most cultures have been found to identify laughter as a sign of humor, joy, or pleasure. Likewise, most cultures recognize music in some form. Music and laughter are examples of:

- a. relativism
- b. ethnocentrism
- c. xenocentrism
- d. universalism

Solution:**Answer**

D

Short Answer**Exercise:****Problem:**

Examine the difference between material and nonmaterial culture in your world. Identify ten objects that are part of your regular cultural experience. For each, then identify what aspects of nonmaterial culture (values and beliefs) that these objects represent. What has this exercise revealed to you about your culture?

Exercise:**Problem:**

Do you feel that feelings of ethnocentricity or xenocentricity are more prevalent in U.S. culture? Why do you believe this? What issues or events might inform this?

Further Research

In January 2011, a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America presented evidence indicating that the hormone oxytocin could regulate and manage instances of ethnocentrism. Read the full article here:

<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/oxytocin>

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Glossary

cultural imperialism

the deliberate imposition of one's own cultural values on another culture

cultural relativism

the practice of assessing a culture by its own standards, and not in comparison to another culture

cultural universals

patterns or traits that are globally common to all societies

culture shock

an experience of personal disorientation when confronted with an unfamiliar way of life

ethnocentrism

to evaluate another culture according to the standards of one's own culture

material culture

the objects or belongings of a group of people

nonmaterial culture

the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of a society

xenocentrism

a belief that another culture is superior to one's own

Elements of Culture

- Understand how values and beliefs differ from norms
- Explain the significance of symbols and language to a culture
- Explain the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis
- Discuss the role of social control within culture

Values and Beliefs

The first, and perhaps most crucial, elements of culture we will discuss are its values and beliefs. **Values** are a culture's standard for discerning what is good and just in society. Values are deeply embedded and critical for transmitting and teaching a culture's beliefs. **Beliefs** are the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true. Individuals in a society have specific beliefs, but they also share collective values. To illustrate the difference, Americans commonly believe in the American Dream—that anyone who works hard enough will be successful and wealthy. Underlying this belief is the American value that wealth is good and important.

Values help shape a society by suggesting what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, sought or avoided. Consider the value the culture the United States places upon youth. Children represent innocence and purity, while a youthful adult appearance signifies sexuality. Shaped by this value, individuals spend millions of dollars each year on cosmetic products and surgeries to look young and beautiful. The United States also has an individualistic culture, meaning people place a high value on individuality and independence. In contrast, many other cultures are collectivist, meaning the welfare of the group and group relationships are a primary value.

Living up to a culture's values can be difficult. It's easy to value good health, but it's hard to quit smoking. Marital monogamy is valued, but many spouses engage in infidelity. Cultural diversity and equal opportunities for all people are valued in the United States, yet the country's highest political offices have been dominated by white men.

Values often suggest how people should behave, but they don't accurately reflect how people do behave. Values portray an **ideal culture**, the

standards society would like to embrace and live up to. But ideal culture differs from **real culture**, the way society actually is, based on what occurs and exists. In an ideal culture, there would be no traffic accidents, murders, poverty, or racial tension. But in real culture, police officers, lawmakers, educators, and social workers constantly strive to prevent or repair those accidents, crimes, and injustices. American teenagers are encouraged to value celibacy. However, the number of unplanned pregnancies among teens reveals that not only is the ideal hard to live up to, but that the value alone is not enough to spare teenagers from the potential consequences of having sex.

One way societies strive to put values into action is through rewards, sanctions, and punishments. When people observe the norms of society and uphold its values, they are often rewarded. A boy who helps an elderly woman board a bus may receive a smile and a “thank you.” A business manager who raises profit margins may receive a quarterly bonus. People **sanction** certain behaviors by giving their support, approval, or permission, or by instilling formal actions of disapproval and non-support. Sanctions are a form of **social control**, a way to encourage conformity to cultural norms. Sometimes people conform to norms in anticipation or expectation of positive sanctions: good grades, for instance, may mean praise from parents and teachers.

When people go against a society’s values, they are punished. A boy who shoves an elderly woman aside to board the bus first may receive frowns or even a scolding from other passengers. A business manager who drives away customers will likely be fired. Breaking norms and rejecting values can lead to cultural sanctions such as earning a negative label—lazy, no-good bum—or to legal sanctions such as traffic tickets, fines, or imprisonment.

Values are not static; they vary across time and between groups as people evaluate, debate, and change collective societal beliefs. Values also vary from culture to culture. For example, cultures differ in their values about what kinds of physical closeness are appropriate in public. It’s rare to see two male friends or coworkers holding hands in the United States where that behavior often symbolizes romantic feelings. But in many nations,

masculine physical intimacy is considered natural in public. This difference in cultural values came to light when people reacted to photos of former president George W. Bush holding hands with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in 2005. A simple gesture, such as hand-holding, carries great symbolic differences across cultures.



In many parts of Africa and the Middle East, it is considered normal for men to hold hands in friendship. How would Americans react to these two soldiers? (Photo courtesy of Geordie Mott/Wikimedia Commons)

Norms

So far, the examples in this chapter have often described how people are expected to behave in certain situations—for example, when buying food or boarding a bus. These examples describe the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured, or what sociologists call norms. **Norms** define how to behave in accordance with what a society has

defined as good, right, and important, and most members of the society adhere to them.

Formal norms are established, written rules. They are behaviors worked out and agreed upon in order to suit and serve the most people. Laws are formal norms, but so are employee manuals, college entrance exam requirements, and “no running” signs at swimming pools. Formal norms are the most specific and clearly stated of the various types of norms, and the most strictly enforced. But even formal norms are enforced to varying degrees, reflected in cultural values.

For example, money is highly valued in the United States, so monetary crimes are punished. It’s against the law to rob a bank, and banks go to great lengths to prevent such crimes. People safeguard valuable possessions and install antitheft devices to protect homes and cars. A less strictly enforced social norm is driving while intoxicated. While it’s against the law to drive drunk, drinking is for the most part an acceptable social behavior. And though there are laws to punish drunk driving, there are few systems in place to prevent the crime. These examples show a range of enforcement in formal norms.

There are plenty of formal norms, but the list of **informal norms**—casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to—is longer. People learn informal norms by observation, imitation, and general socialization. Some informal norms are taught directly—“Kiss your Aunt Edna” or “Use your napkin”—while others are learned by observation, including observations of the consequences when someone else violates a norm. But although informal norms define personal interactions, they extend into other systems as well. Think back to the discussion of fast food restaurants at the beginning of this chapter. In the United States, there are informal norms regarding behavior at these restaurants. Customers line up to order their food, and leave when they are done. They don’t sit down at a table with strangers, sing loudly as they prepare their condiments, or nap in a booth. Most people don’t commit even benign breaches of informal norms. Informal norms dictate appropriate behaviors without the need of written rules.

Note:**Breaching Experiments**

Sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1917–2011) studied people’s customs in order to find out how societal rules and norms not only influenced behavior but shaped social order. He believed that members of society together create a social order (Weber 2011). His resulting book, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, published in 1967, discusses people’s assumptions about the social make-up of their communities.

One of his research methods was known as a “breaching experiment.” His breaching experiments tested sociological concepts of social norms and conformity. In a breaching experiment, the researcher behaves in a socially awkward manner. The participants are not aware an experiment is in progress. If the breach is successful, however, these “innocent bystanders” will respond in some way. For example, if the experimenter is, say, a man in a business suit, and he skips down the sidewalk or hops on one foot, the passersby are likely to stare at him with surprised expressions on their faces. But the experimenter does not simply “act weird” in public. Rather, the point is to deviate from a specific social norm in a small way, to subtly break some form of social etiquette, and see what happens.

To conduct his ethnomethodology, Garfinkel deliberately imposed strange behaviors on unknowing people. Then he would observe their responses. He suspected that odd behaviors would shatter conventional expectations, but he wasn’t sure how. He set up, for example, a simple game of tic-tac-toe. One player was asked beforehand not to mark Xs and Os in the boxes but on the lines dividing the spaces instead. The other player, in the dark about the study, was flabbergasted and did not know how to continue.

Their reactions of outrage, anger, puzzlement, or other emotions illustrated the existence of cultural norms that constitute social life. These cultural norms play an important role. They let us know how to behave around each other and how to feel comfortable in our community.

There are many rules about speaking with strangers in public. It’s okay to tell a woman you like her shoes. It’s not okay to ask if you can try them on. It’s okay to stand in line behind someone at the ATM. It’s not okay to look over their shoulder as they make their transaction. It’s okay to sit beside someone on a crowded bus. It’s weird to sit beside a stranger in a half-empty bus.

For some breaches, the researcher directly engages with innocent bystanders. An experimenter might strike up a conversation in a public bathroom, where it's common to respect each other's privacy so fiercely as to ignore other people's presence. In a grocery store, an experimenter might take a food item out of another person's grocery cart, saying, "That looks good! I think I'll try it." An experimenter might sit down at a table with others in a fast food restaurant, or follow someone around a museum, studying the same paintings. In those cases, the bystanders are pressured to respond, and their discomfort illustrates how much we depend on social norms. Breaching experiments uncover and explore the many unwritten social rules we live by.

Norms may be further classified as either mores or folkways. **Mores** (moral norms) are norms that embody the moral views and principles of a group. Violating them can have serious consequences. The strongest mores are legally protected with laws or other formal norms. In the United States, for instance, murder is considered immoral, and it's punishable by law (a formal norm). But more often, mores are judged and guarded by public sentiment (an informal norm). People who violate mores are seen as shameful. They can even be shunned or banned from some groups. The mores of the U.S. school system require that a student's writing be in the student's own words or use special forms (such as quotation marks and a whole system of citation) for crediting other writers. Writing another person's words as if they are one's own has a name—plagiarism. The consequences for violating this norm are severe, and can usually result in expulsion.

Unlike mores, **folkways** are norms without any moral underpinnings. Rather, folkways direct appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture. Folkways indicate whether to shake hands or kiss on the cheek when greeting another person. They specify whether to wear a tie and blazer or a T-shirt and sandals to an event. In Canada, women can smile and say hello to men on the street. In Egypt, it's not acceptable. In regions in the southern United States, bumping into an acquaintance means stopping to chat. It's considered rude not to, no matter how busy one is. In

other regions, people guard their privacy and value time efficiency. A simple nod of the head is enough.

Many folkways are actions we take for granted. People need to act without thinking to get seamlessly through daily routines; they can't stop and analyze every action (Sumner 1906). People who experience culture shock may find that it subsides as they learn the new culture's folkways and are able to move through their daily routines more smoothly. Folkways might be small manners, learned by observation and imitated, but they are by no means trivial. Like mores and laws, these norms help people negotiate their daily life within a given culture.

Symbols and Language

Humans, consciously and subconsciously, are always striving to make sense of their surrounding world. **Symbols**—such as gestures, signs, objects, signals, and words—help people understand the world. Symbols provide clues to understanding experiences. They convey recognizable meanings that are shared by societies.

The world is filled with symbols. Sports uniforms, company logos, and traffic signs are symbols. In some cultures, a gold ring is a symbol of marriage. Some symbols are highly functional; stop signs, for instance, provide useful instruction. As physical objects, they belong to material culture, but because they function as symbols, they also convey nonmaterial cultural meanings. Some symbols are only valuable in what they represent. Trophies, blue ribbons, or gold medals, for example, serve no other purpose other than to represent accomplishments. But many objects have both material and nonmaterial symbolic value.

A police officer's badge and uniform are symbols of authority and law enforcement. The sight of an officer in uniform or a squad car triggers reassurance in some citizens, and annoyance, fear, or anger in others.

It's easy to take symbols for granted. Few people challenge or even think about stick figure signs on the doors of public bathrooms. But those figures are more than just symbols that tell men and women which bathrooms to

use. They also uphold the value, in the United States, that public restrooms should be gender exclusive. Even though stalls are relatively private, most places don't offer unisex bathrooms.



Some road signs are universal.

But how would you interpret the signage on the right? (Photo (a) courtesy of Andrew Bain/flickr; Photo (b) courtesy of HonzaSoukup/flickr)

Symbols often get noticed when they are used out of context. Used unconventionally, symbols convey strong messages. A stop sign on the door of a corporation makes a political statement, as does a camouflage military jacket worn in an antiwar protest. Together, the semaphore signals for “N” and “D” represent nuclear disarmament—and form the well-known peace sign (Westcott 2008). Today, some college students have taken to wearing pajamas and bedroom slippers to class, clothing that was formerly associated only with privacy and bedtime. Though students might deny it, the outfit defies traditional cultural norms and makes a statement.

Even the destruction of symbols is symbolic. Effigies representing public figures are beaten to demonstrate anger at certain leaders. In 1989, crowds

tore down the Berlin Wall, a decades-old symbol of the division between East and West Germany, communism, and capitalism.

While different cultures have varying systems of symbols, there is one that is common to all: language. **Language** is a symbolic system through which people communicate and through which culture is transmitted. Some languages contain a system of symbols used for written communication, while others rely only on spoken communication and nonverbal actions.

Societies often share a single language, and many languages contain the same basic elements. An alphabet is a written system made of symbolic shapes that refer to spoken sound. Taken together, these symbols convey specific meanings. The English alphabet uses a combination of 26 letters to create words; these 26 letters make up over 600,000 recognized English words (OED Online 2011).

Rules for speaking and writing vary even within cultures, most notably by region. Do you refer to a can of carbonated liquid as “soda,” “pop,” or “Coke”? Is a household entertainment room a “family room,” “rec room,” or “den”? When leaving a restaurant, do you ask your server for a “check,” the “ticket,” or your “bill”?

Language is constantly evolving as societies create new ideas. In this age of technology, people have adapted almost instantly to new nouns such as “e-mail” and “Internet,” and verbs such as “downloading,” “texting,” and “blogging.” Twenty years ago, the general public would have considered these nonsense words.

Even while it constantly evolves, language continues to shape our reality. This insight was established in the 1920s by two linguists, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf. They believed that reality is culturally determined, and that any interpretation of reality is based on a society’s language. To prove this point, the sociologists argued that every language has words or expressions specific to that language. In the United States, for example, the number 13 is associated with bad luck. In Japan, however, the number four is considered unlucky, since it is pronounced similarly to the Japanese word for “death.”

The **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** is based on the idea that people experience their world through their language, and that they therefore understand their world through the culture embedded in their language. The hypothesis, which has also been called linguistic relativity, states that language shapes thought (Swoyer 2003). Studies have shown, for instance, that unless people have access to the word “ambivalent,” they don’t recognize an experience of uncertainty due to conflicting positive and negative feelings about one issue. Essentially, the hypothesis argues, if a person can’t describe the experience, the person is not having the experience.

In addition to using language, people communicate without words. Nonverbal communication is symbolic, and, as in the case of language, much of it is learned through one’s culture. Some gestures are nearly universal: smiles often represent joy and crying often represents sadness. Other nonverbal symbols vary across cultural contexts in their meaning. A thumbs-up, for example, indicates positive reinforcement in the United States, whereas in Russia and Australia, it is an offensive curse (Passero 2002). Other gestures vary in meaning depending on the situation and the person. A wave of the hand can mean many things, depending on how it’s done and for whom. It may mean “hello,” “goodbye,” “no thank you,” or “I’m royalty.” Winks convey a variety of messages, including “We have a secret,” “I’m only kidding,” or “I’m attracted to you.” From a distance, a person can understand the emotional gist of two people in conversation just by watching their body language and facial expressions. Furrowed brows and folded arms indicate a serious topic, possibly an argument. Smiles, with heads lifted and arms open, suggest a lighthearted, friendly chat.

Note:

Is the United States Bilingual?

In 1991, when she was 6 years old, Lucy Alvarez attended a school that allowed for the use of both English and Spanish. Lucy’s teacher was bilingual, the librarian offered bilingual books, and many of the school staff spoke both Spanish and English. Lucy and many of her classmates who spoke only Spanish at home were lucky. According to the U.S. Census, 13.8 percent of U.S. residents speak a non-English language at

home. That's a significant figure, but not enough to ensure that Lucy would be encouraged to use her native language in school (Mount 2010).

Lucy's parents, who moved to Texas from Mexico, struggled under the pressure to speak English. Lucy might easily have gotten lost and left behind if she'd felt the same pressure in school. In 2008, researchers from Johns Hopkins University conducted a series of studies on the effects of bilingual education (Slavin et al. 2008). They found that students taught in both their native tongue and English make better progress than those taught only in English.

Technically, the United States has no official language. But many believe English to be the rightful language of the United States, and over 30 states have passed laws specifying English as the official tongue. Proponents of English-only laws suggest that a national ruling will save money on translation, printing, and human resource costs, including funding for bilingual teachers. They argue that setting English as the official language will encourage non-English speakers to learn English faster and adapt to the culture of the United States more easily (Mount 2010).

Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) oppose making English the official language, claiming that it violates the rights of non-English speakers. English-only laws, they believe, deny the reality of our nation's diversity and unfairly target Latinos and Asians. They point to the fact that much of the debate on this topic has risen since 1970, a time when the United States experienced new waves of immigration from Asia and Mexico.

Today, a lot of product information gets written in multiple languages. Enter a store like Home Depot and you'll find signs in both English and Spanish. Buy a children's product and the safety warnings will be presented in multiple languages. While marketers are financially motivated to reach the largest number of consumers possible, this trend also may help people acclimate to a culture of bilingualism.

Studies show that most American immigrants eventually abandon their native tongue and become fluent in English. Bilingual education helps with that transition. Today, Lucy Alvarez is an ambitious and high-achieving college student. Fluent in both English and Spanish, Lucy is studying law enforcement, a field that seeks bilingual employees. The same bilingualism that contributed to her success in grade school will help her thrive professionally as a law officer serving her community.



Nowadays, many signs—on streets and in stores—include both English and Spanish. What effect does this have on members of society? What effect does it have on our culture? (Photo courtesy of istoletv/flickr)

Summary

A culture consists of many elements, such as the values and beliefs of its society. Culture is also governed by norms, including laws, mores, and folkways. The symbols and language of a society are key to developing and conveying culture.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: A nation's flag is:

- a. A symbol
 - b. A value
 - c. A culture
 - d. A folkway
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

The existence of social norms, both formal and informal, is one of the main things that inform _____, otherwise known as a way to encourage social conformity.

- a. values
 - b. sanctions
 - c. social control
 - d. mores
-

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem: The biggest difference between mores and folkways is that

- a. mores are primarily linked to morality, whereas folkways are primarily linked to being commonplace within a culture
- b. mores are absolute, whereas folkways are temporary
- c. mores refer to material culture, whereas folkways refer to nonmaterial culture

d. mores refer to nonmaterial culture, whereas folkways refer to material culture

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

The notion that people cannot feel or experience something that they do not have a word for can be explained by:

- a. linguistics
 - b. Sapir-Whorf
 - c. Ethnographic imagery
 - d. bilingualism
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem: Cultural sanctions can also be viewed as ways that society:

- a. Establishes leaders
 - b. Determines language
 - c. Regulates behavior
 - d. Determines laws
-

Solution:

Answer

C

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

What do you think of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? Do you agree or disagree with it? Cite examples or research to support your point of view.

Exercise:

Problem:

How do you think your culture would exist if there were no such thing as a social “norm”? Do you think chaos would ensue or relative peace could be kept? Explain.

Further Research

The science-fiction novel, *Babel-17*, by Samuel R. Delaney was based upon the principles of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Read an excerpt from the novel here: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Babel-17>

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Glossary

beliefs

tenets or convictions that people hold to be true

folkways

direct appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture

formal norms

established, written rules

ideal culture

consists of the standards a society would like to embrace and live up to

informal norms

casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to

language

a symbolic system of communication

mores

the moral views and principles of a group

norms

the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured

real culture

the way society really is based on what actually occurs and exists

sanctions

a way to authorize or formally disapprove of certain behaviors

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

people understand the world based on their form of language

social control

a way to encourage conformity to cultural norms

symbols

gestures or objects that have meanings associated with them that are recognized by people who share a culture

values

a culture's standard for discerning what is good and just in society

Pop Culture, Subculture, and Cultural Change

- Discuss the roles of both high culture and pop culture within society
- Differentiate between subculture and counterculture
- Explain the role of innovation, invention, and discovery in culture
- Understand the role of cultural lag and globalization in cultural change

It may seem obvious that there are a multitude of cultural differences between societies in the world. After all, we can easily see that people vary from one society to the next. It's natural that a young woman from rural Kenya would have a very different view of the world from an elderly man in Mumbai—one of the most populated cities in the world. Additionally, each culture has its own internal variations. Sometimes the differences between cultures are not nearly as large as the differences inside cultures.

High Culture and Popular Culture

Do you prefer listening to opera or hip hop music? Do you like watching horse racing or NASCAR? Do you read books of poetry or celebrity magazines? In each pair, one type of entertainment is considered high-brow and the other low-brow. Sociologists use the term **high culture** to describe the pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in the highest class segments of a society. People often associate high culture with intellectualism, political power, and prestige. In America, high culture also tends to be associated with wealth. Events considered high culture can be expensive and formal—attending a ballet, seeing a play, or listening to a live symphony performance.

The term **popular culture** refers to the pattern of cultural experiences and attitudes that exist in mainstream society. Popular culture events might include a parade, a baseball game, or the season finale of a TV show. Rock and pop music—“pop” short for “popular”—are part of popular culture. In modern times, popular culture is often expressed and spread via commercial media such as radio, television, movies, the music industry, publishers, and corporate-run websites. Unlike high culture, popular culture is known and accessible to most people. You can share a discussion of favorite football teams with a new coworker, or comment on “American Idol” when making

small talk in line at the grocery store. But if you tried to launch into a deep discussion on the classical Greek play *Antigone*, few members of American society today would be familiar with it.

Although high culture may be viewed as superior to popular culture, the labels of high culture and popular culture vary over time and place. Shakespearean plays, considered pop culture when they were written, are now among our society's high culture. Five hundred years from now, will our descendants associate watching *Two and a Half Men* with members of the cultural elite?

Subculture and Counterculture

A **subculture** is just as it sounds—a smaller cultural group within a larger culture; people of a subculture are part of the larger culture, but also share a specific identity within a smaller group.

Thousands of subcultures exist within the United States. Ethnic and racial groups share the language, food, and customs of their heritage. Other subcultures are united by shared experiences. Biker culture revolves around a dedication to motorcycles. Some subcultures are formed by members who possess traits or preferences that differ from the majority of a society's population. The body modification community embraces aesthetic additions to the human body, such as tattoos, piercings, and certain forms of plastic surgery. In the United States, adolescents often form subcultures to develop a shared youth identity. Alcoholics Anonymous offers support to those suffering from alcoholism. But even as members of a subculture band together, they still identify with and participate in the larger society.

Sociologists distinguish subcultures from **countercultures**, which are a type of subculture that rejects some of the larger culture's norms and values. In contrast to subcultures, which operate relatively smoothly within the larger society, countercultures might actively defy larger society by developing their own set of rules and norms to live by, sometimes even creating communities that operate outside of greater society.

Cults, a word derived from culture, are also considered counterculture group. The group “Yearning for Zion” (YFZ) in Eldorado, Texas, existed outside the mainstream, and the limelight, until its leader was accused of statutory rape and underage marriage. The sect’s formal norms clashed too severely to be tolerated by U.S. law, and in 2008, authorities raided the compound, removing more than two hundred women and children from the property.

Note:

The Evolution of American Hipster Subculture

Skinny jeans, chunky glasses, and T-shirts with vintage logos—the American hipster is a recognizable figure in the modern United States. Based predominately in metropolitan areas, sometimes clustered around hotspots such as the Williamsburg neighborhood in New York City, hipsters define themselves through a rejection of the mainstream. As a subculture, hipsters spurn many of the values and beliefs of American culture, preferring vintage clothing to fashion and a bohemian lifestyle to one of wealth and power. While hipster culture may seem to be the new trend among young, middle-class youth, the history of the group stretches back to the early decades of the 1900s.

Where did the hipster culture begin? In the early 1940s, jazz music was on the rise in the United States. Musicians were known as “hepcats” and had a smooth, relaxed quality that went against upright, mainstream life. Those who were “hep” or “hip” lived by the code of jazz, while those who were “square” lived according to society’s rules. The idea of a “hipster” was born.

The hipster movement spread and young people, drawn to the music and fashion, took on attitudes and language derived from the culture of jazz. Unlike the vernacular of the day, hipster slang was purposefully ambiguous. When hipsters said, “It’s cool, man,” they meant not that everything was good, but that it was the way it was.



In the 1940s,
American hipsters
were associated with
the “cool” culture of
jazz. (Photo courtesy
of William P.
Gottlieb/Ira and
Leonore S. Gershwin
Fund Collection,
Music Division,
Library of Congress)

By the 1950s, the jazz culture was winding down and many traits of hepcat culture were becoming mainstream. A new subculture was on the rise. The “Beat Generation,” a title coined by writer Jack Kerouac, were anticonformist and antimaterialistic. They were writers who listened to jazz and embraced radical politics. They bummed around, hitchhiked the country, and lived in squalor.

The lifestyle spread. College students, clutching copies of Kerouac’s *On the Road*, dressed in berets, black turtlenecks, and black-rimmed glasses. Women wore black leotards and grew their hair long. Herb Caen, a San Francisco journalist, used the suffix from *Sputnik 1*, the Russian satellite that orbited Earth in 1957, to dub the movement’s followers “Beatniks.” As the Beat Generation faded, a new, related movement began. It too focused on breaking social boundaries, but also advocated freedom of

expression, philosophy, and love. It took its name from the generations before; in fact, some theorists claim that Beats themselves coined the term to describe their children. Over time, the “little hipsters” of the 1970s became known simply as “hippies.”

Today’s generation of hipsters rose out of the hippie movement in the same way that hippies rose from Beats and Beats from hepcats. Although contemporary hipsters may not seem to have much in common with 1940 hipsters, the emulation of nonconformity is still there. In 2010, sociologist Mark Greif set about investigating the hipster subculture of the United States and found that much of what tied the group members together was not based on fashion or musical taste or even a specific point of contention with the mainstream. “All hipsters play at being the inventors or first adopters of novelties,” Greif wrote. “Pride comes from knowing, and deciding, what’s cool in advance of the rest of the world. Yet the habits of hatred and accusation are endemic to hipsters because they feel the weakness of everyone’s position—including their own” (Greif 2010). Much as the hepcats of jazz era opposed common culture with carefully crafted appearances of coolness and relaxation, modern hipsters reject mainstream values with a purposeful apathy.

Young people are often drawn to oppose mainstream conventions, even if in the same way that others do. Ironic, cool to the point of non-caring, and intellectual, hipsters continue to embody a subculture, while simultaneously impacting mainstream culture.



Intellectual and

trendy, today's
hipsters define
themselves through
cultural irony.
(Photo courtesy of
Lorena
Cupcake/Wikimedi
a Commons)

Cultural Change

As the hipster example illustrates, culture is always evolving. Moreover, new things are added to material culture every day, and they affect nonmaterial culture as well. Cultures change when something new (say, railroads or smartphones) opens up new ways of living and when new ideas enter a culture (say, as a result of travel or globalization).

Innovation: Discovery and Invention

An **innovation** refers to an object or concept's initial appearance in society—it's innovative because it is markedly new. There are two ways to come across an innovative object or idea: discover it or invent it. **Discoveries** make known previously unknown but existing aspects of reality. In 1610, when Galileo looked through his telescope and discovered Saturn, the planet was already there, but until then, no one had known about it. When Christopher Columbus encountered America, the land was, of course, already well known to its inhabitants. However, Columbus's discovery was new knowledge for Europeans, and it opened the way to changes in European culture, as well as to the cultures of the discovered lands. For example, new foods such as potatoes and tomatoes transformed the European diet, and horses brought from Europe changed hunting practices of Native American tribes of the Great Plains.

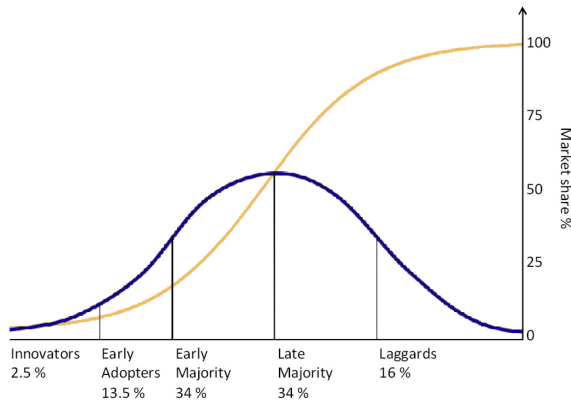
Inventions result when something new is formed from existing objects or concepts—when things are put together in an entirely new manner. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, electric appliances were invented at an astonishing pace. Cars, airplanes, vacuum cleaners, lamps, radios, telephones, and televisions were all new inventions. Inventions may shape a culture when people use them in place of older ways of carrying out activities and relating to others, or as a way to carry out new kinds of activities. Their adoption reflects (and may shape) cultural values, and their use may require new norms for new situations.

Consider the introduction of modern communication technology such as mobile phones and smartphones. As more and more people began carrying these devices, phone conversations no longer were restricted to homes, offices, and phone booths. People on trains, in restaurants, and in other public places became annoyed by listening to one-sided conversations. Norms were needed for cell phone use. Some people pushed for the idea that those who are out in the world should pay attention to their companions and surroundings. However, technology enabled a workaround: texting, which enables quiet communication, and has surpassed phoning as the chief way to meet today's highly valued ability to stay in touch anywhere, everywhere.

When the pace of innovation increases, it can lead to generation gaps. Technological gadgets that catch on quickly with one generation are sometimes dismissed by a skeptical older generation. A culture's objects and ideas can cause not just generational but cultural gaps. Material culture tends to diffuse more quickly than nonmaterial culture; technology can spread through society in a matter of months, but it can take generations for the ideas and beliefs of society to change. Sociologist William F. Ogburn coined the term **culture lag** to refer to this time that elapses between when a new item of material culture is introduced and when it becomes an accepted part of nonmaterial culture (Ogburn 1957).

Culture lag can also cause tangible problems. The infrastructure of the United States, built a hundred years ago or more, is having trouble supporting today's more heavily populated and fast-paced life. Yet there is a lag in conceptualizing solutions to infrastructure problems. Rising fuel

prices, increased air pollution, and traffic jams are all symptoms of culture lag. Although people are becoming aware of the consequences of overusing resources, the means to support changes takes time to achieve.



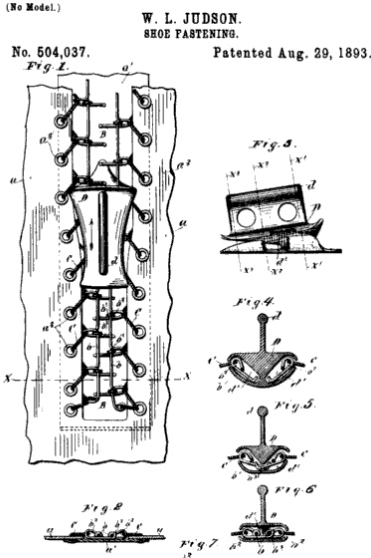
Sociologist Everett Rogers (1962) developed a model of the diffusion of innovations. As consumers gradually adopt a new innovation, the item grows toward a market share of 100 percent, or complete saturation within a society. (Graph courtesy of Tungsten/Wikimedia Commons)

Diffusion and Globalization

The integration of world markets and technological advances of the last decades have allowed for greater exchange between cultures through the processes of globalization and diffusion. Beginning in the 1980s, Western governments began to deregulate social services while granting greater

liberties to private businesses. As a result, world markets became dominated by multinational companies in the 1980s, a new state of affairs at that time. We have since come to refer to this integration of international trade and finance markets as **globalization**. Increased communications and air travel have further opened doors for international business relations, facilitating the flow not only of goods but of information and people as well (Scheuerman 2010). Today, many U.S. companies set up offices in other nations where the costs of resources and labor are cheaper. When a person in the United States calls to get information about banking, insurance, or computer services, the person taking that call may be working in India or Indonesia.

Alongside the process of globalization is **diffusion**, or, the spread of material and nonmaterial culture. While globalization refers to the integration of markets, diffusion relates a similar process to the integration of international cultures. Middle-class Americans can fly overseas and return with a new appreciation of Thai noodles or Italian gelato. Access to television and the Internet has brought the lifestyles and values portrayed in American sitcoms into homes around the globe. Twitter feeds from public demonstrations in one nation have encouraged political protesters in other countries. When this kind of diffusion occurs, material objects and ideas from one culture are introduced into another.



Officially patented in 1893 as the “clasp locker” (left), the zipper did not diffuse through society for many decades. Today, it is immediately recognizable around the world. (Photo (a) courtesy of U.S. Patent Office/Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of Rabensteiner/Wikimedia Commons)

Summary

Sociologists recognize high culture and popular culture within societies. Societies are also comprised of many subcultures—smaller groups that share an identity. Countercultures reject mainstream values and create their own cultural rules and norms. Through invention or discovery, cultures evolve via new ideas and new ways of thinking. In many modern cultures, the cornerstone of innovation is technology, the rapid growth of which can lead to cultural lag. Technology is also responsible for the spread of both material and nonmaterial culture that contributes to globalization.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

An example of high culture is _____, whereas an example of popular culture would be _____.

- a. Dostoevsky style in film; “American Idol” winners
 - b. medical marijuana; film noir
 - c. country music; pop music
 - d. political theory; sociological theory
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem: The Ku Klux Klan is an example of what part of culture?

- a. Counterculture
- b. Subculture
- c. Multiculturalism
- d. Afrocentricity

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem: Modern-day hipsters are an example of:

- a. ethnocentricity
- b. counterculture
- c. subculture
- d. high culture

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

Your 83-year-old grandmother has been using a computer for some time now. As a way to keep in touch, you frequently send e-mails of a few lines to let her know about your day. She calls after every e-mail to respond point by point, but she has never e-mailed a response back. This can be viewed as an example of:

- a. cultural lag
- b. innovation
- c. ethnocentricity
- d. xenophobia

Solution:**Answer**

A

Exercise:**Problem:**

Some jobs today advertise in multinational markets and permit telecommuting in lieu of working from a primary location. This broadening of the job market and the way that jobs are performed can be attributed to:

- a. cultural lag
- b. innovation
- c. discovery
- d. globalization

Solution:**Answer**

D

Exercise:

Problem: The major difference between invention and discovery is:

- a. Invention is based on technology, whereas discovery is usually based on culture
- b. Discovery involves finding something that already exists, but invention puts things together in a new way
- c. Invention refers to material culture, whereas discovery can be material or theoretic, like laws of physics
- d. Invention is typically used to refer to international objects, whereas discovery refers to that which is local to one's culture

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

That McDonald's is found in almost every country around the world is an example of:

- a. globalization
- b. diffusion
- c. culture lag
- d. xenocentrism

Solution:

Answer

B

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Identify several examples of popular culture and describe how they inform larger culture. How prevalent is the effect of these examples in your everyday life?

Exercise:

Problem:

Consider some of the specific issues or concerns of your generation. Are any ideas countercultural? What subcultures have emerged from your generation? How have the issues of your generation expressed themselves culturally? How has your generation made its mark on society's collective culture?

Exercise:

Problem:

What are some examples of cultural lag that are present in your life? Do you think technology affects culture positively or negatively? Explain.

Further Research

The Beats were a counterculture that birthed an entire movement of art, music, and literature—much of which is still highly regarded and studied today. The man responsible for naming the generation was Jack Kerouac; however, the man responsible for introducing the world to that generation was John Clellon Holmes, a writer often lumped in with the group. In 1952 he penned an article for the *New York Times Magazine* titled “This Is the Beat Generation.” Read that article and learn more about Clellon Holmes and the Beats: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/The-Beats>

Popular culture meets counterculture in this as Oprah Winfrey interacts with members of the Yearning for Zion cult. Read about it here: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Oprah>

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Glossary

countercultures

groups that reject and oppose society's widely accepted cultural patterns

culture lag

the gap of time between the introduction of material culture and nonmaterial culture's acceptance of it

diffusion

the spread of material and nonmaterial culture from one culture to another

discoveries

things and ideas found from what already exists

globalization

the integration of international trade and finance markets

high culture

the cultural patterns of a society's elite

innovations

new objects or ideas introduced to culture for the first time

inventions

a combination of pieces of existing reality into new forms

popular culture

mainstream, widespread patterns among a society's population

subcultures

groups that share a specific identification, apart from a society's majority, even as the members exist within a larger society

Theoretical Perspectives on Culture

- Discuss the major theoretical approaches to cultural interpretation

Music, fashion, technology, and values—all are products of culture. But what do they mean? How do sociologists perceive and interpret culture based on these material and nonmaterial items? Let's finish our analysis of culture by reviewing them in the context of three theoretical perspectives: functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

Functionalists view society as a system in which all parts work—or function—together to create society as a whole. In this way, societies need culture to exist. Cultural norms function to support the fluid operation of society, and cultural values guide people in making choices. Just as members of a society work together to fulfill a society's needs, culture exists to meet its members' basic needs.

Functionalists also study culture in terms of values. Education is an important concept in the United States because it is valued. The culture of education—including material culture such as classrooms, textbooks, libraries, dormitories—supports the emphasis placed on the value of educating a society's members.



This statue of Superman stands in the center of Metropolis, Illinois. His pedestal reads “Truth—Justice—The American Way.” How would a

functionalist interpret this statue? What does it reveal about the values of American culture? (Photo courtesy of David Wilson/flickr)

Conflict theorists view social structure as inherently unequal, based on power differentials related to issues like class, gender, race, and age. For a conflict theorist, culture is seen as reinforcing and perpetuating those inequalities and differences in power. Women strive for equality in a male-dominated society. Senior citizens struggle to protect their rights, their health care, and their independence from a younger generation of lawmakers. Advocacy groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union work to protect the rights of all races and ethnicities in the United States.

Inequalities exist within a culture's value system. Therefore, a society's cultural norms benefit some people but hurt others. Some norms, formal and informal, are practiced at the expense of others. Women were not allowed to vote in the United States until 1920. Gay and lesbian couples have been denied the right to marry until a few recent opportunities have emerged. Racism and bigotry are very much alive today. Although cultural diversity is supposedly valued in the United States, many people still frown upon interracial marriages. Same-sex marriages are banned in most states, and polygamy—common in some cultures—is unthinkable to most Americans.

At the core of conflict theory is the effect of economic production and materialism: dependence on technology in rich nations versus a lack of technology and education in poor nations. Conflict theorists believe that a society's system of material production has an effect on the rest of culture. People who have less power also have less ability to adapt to cultural change. This view contrasts with the perspective of functionalism. In the US culture of capitalism, to illustrate, we continue to strive toward the

promise of the American dream, which perpetuates the belief that the wealthy deserve their privileges.

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological perspective that is most concerned with the face-to-face interactions between members of society.

Interactionists see culture as being created and maintained by the ways people interact and in how individuals interpret each other's actions.

Proponents of this theory conceptualize human interactions as a continuous process of deriving meaning from both objects in the environment and the actions of others. This is where the term symbolic comes into play. Every object and action has a symbolic meaning, and language serves as a means for people to represent and communicate their interpretations of these meanings to others. Those who believe in symbolic interactionism perceive culture as highly dynamic and fluid, as it is dependent on how meaning is interpreted and how individuals interact when conveying these meanings.

We began this chapter by asking what culture is. Culture is comprised of all the practices, beliefs, and behaviors of a society. Because culture is learned, it includes how people think and express themselves. While we may like to consider ourselves individuals, we must acknowledge the impact of culture; we inherit thought language that shapes our perceptions and patterned behavior, including about issues of family and friends, and faith and politics.

To an extent, culture is a social comfort. After all, sharing a similar culture with others is precisely what defines societies. Nations would not exist if people did not coexist culturally. There could be no societies if people did not share heritage and language, and civilization would cease to function if people did not agree to similar values and systems of social control. Culture is preserved through transmission from one generation to the next, but it also evolves through processes of innovation, discovery, and cultural diffusion. We may be restricted by the confines of our own culture, but as humans we have the ability to question values and make conscious decisions. No better evidence of this freedom exists than the amount of cultural diversity within our own society and around the world. The more we study another culture, the better we become at understanding our own.



This child's clothing may be culturally specific, but her facial expression is universal. (Photo courtesy of Beth Rankin/flickr)

Summary

There are three major theoretical approaches towards the interpretation of culture. A functionalist perspective acknowledges that there are many parts of culture that work together as a system to fulfill society's needs. Functionalists view culture as a reflection of society's values. Conflict theorists see culture as inherently unequal, based upon factors like gender, class, race, and age. An interactionist is primarily interested in culture as experienced in the daily interactions between individuals and the symbols that comprise a culture. Various cultural and sociological occurrences can be explained by these theories; however, there is no one "right" view through which to understand culture.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

A sociologist conducts research into the ways that Hispanic American students are historically underprivileged in the American education system. What theoretical approach is the sociologist using?

- a. Symbolic interactionism
- b. Functionalism
- c. Conflict theory
- d. Ethnocentrism

Solution:**Answer**

C

Exercise:**Problem:**

The Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011 grew to be an international movement. Supporters believe that the economic disparity between the highest economic class and the mid to lower economic classes is growing at an exponentially alarming rate. A sociologist who studies that movement by examining the interactions between members at Occupy camps would most likely use what theoretical approach?

- a. Symbolic interactionism
- b. Functionalism
- c. Conflict theory
- d. Ethnocentrism

Solution:**Answer**

A

Exercise:

Problem:

What theoretical perspective views society as having a system of interdependent inherently connected parts?

- a. Sociobiology
- b. Functionalism
- c. Conflict theory
- d. Ethnocentrism

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

The “American Dream”—the notion that anybody can be successful and rich if they work hard enough—is most commonly associated with which sociological theory?

- a. Sociobiology
- b. Functionalism
- c. Conflict theory
- d. Ethnocentrism

Solution:

Answer

C

Short Answer

Exercise:**Problem:**

Consider a current social trend that you have witnessed, perhaps situated around family, education, transportation, or finances. For example, many veterans of the Armed Forces, after completing tours of duty in the Middle East, are returning to college rather than entering jobs as veterans as previous generations did. Choose a sociological approach—functionalism, conflict theory, or symbolic interactionism—to describe, explain, and analyze the social issue you choose. Afterwards, determine why you chose the approach you did. Does it suit your own way of thinking? Or did it offer the best method to illuminate the social issue?

Introduction to Socialization

class="introduction"

Socialization is how we learn the norms and beliefs of our society. From our earliest family and play experiences, we are made aware of societal values and expectations. (Photo courtesy of Seattle Municipal Archives/flickr)



In the summer of 2005, police detective Mark Holste followed an investigator from the Department of Children and Families to a home in Plant City, Florida. They were there to look into a statement from the neighbor concerning a shabby house on Old Sydney Road. A small girl was reported peering from one of its broken windows. This seemed odd because no one in the neighborhood had seen a young child in or around the home, which had been inhabited for the past three years by a woman, her boyfriend, and two adult sons.

Who was the mystery girl in the window?

Entering the house, Detective Holste and his team were shocked. It was the worst mess they'd ever seen, infested with cockroaches, smeared with feces and urine from both people and pets, and filled with dilapidated furniture and ragged window coverings.

Detective Holste headed down a hallway and entered a small room. That's where he found the little girl, with big, vacant eyes, staring into the darkness. A newspaper report later described the detective's first encounter

with the child: “She lay on a torn, moldy mattress on the floor. She was curled on her side . . . her ribs and collarbone jutted out . . . her black hair was matted, crawling with lice. Insect bites, rashes and sores pocked her skin . . . She was naked—except for a swollen diaper. . . . Her name, her mother said, was Danielle. She was almost seven years old” (DeGregory 2008).

Detective Holste immediately carried Danielle out of the home. She was taken to a hospital for medical treatment and evaluation. Through extensive testing, doctors determined that, although she was severely malnourished, Danielle was able to see, hear, and vocalize normally. Still, she wouldn’t look anyone in the eyes, didn’t know how to chew or swallow solid food, didn’t cry, didn’t respond to stimuli that would typically cause pain, and didn’t know how to communicate either with words or simple gestures such as nodding “yes” or “no.” Likewise, although tests showed she had no chronic diseases or genetic abnormalities, the only way she could stand was with someone holding onto her hands, and she “walked sideways on her toes, like a crab” (DeGregory 2008).

What had happened to Danielle? Put simply: beyond the basic requirements for survival, she had been neglected. Based on their investigation, social workers concluded that she had been left almost entirely alone in rooms like the one where she was found. Without regular interaction—the holding, hugging, talking, the explanations and demonstrations given to most young children—she had not learned to walk or to speak, to eat or to interact, to play or even to understand the world around her. From a sociological point of view, Danielle had not had been socialized.

Socialization is the process through which people are taught to be proficient members of a society. It describes the ways that people come to understand societal norms and expectations, to accept society’s beliefs, and to be aware of societal values. *Socialization* is not the same as *socializing* (interacting with others, like family, friends, and coworkers); to be precise, it is a sociological process that occurs through socializing. As Danielle’s story illustrates, even the most basic of human activities are learned. You may be surprised to know that even physical tasks like sitting, standing, and walking had not automatically developed for Danielle as she grew. And

without socialization, Danielle hadn't learned about the material culture of her society (the tangible objects a culture uses): for example, she couldn't hold a spoon, bounce a ball, or use a chair for sitting. She also hadn't learned its nonmaterial culture, such as its beliefs, values, and norms. She had no understanding of the concept of "family," didn't know cultural expectations for using a bathroom for elimination, and had no sense of modesty. Most importantly, she hadn't learned to use the symbols that make up language—through which we learn about who we are, how we fit with other people, and the natural and social worlds in which we live.

Sociologists have long been fascinated by circumstances like Danielle's—in which a child receives sufficient human support to survive, but virtually no social interaction—because they highlight how much we depend on social interaction to provide the information and skills that we need to be part of society or even to develop a "self."

The necessity for early social contact was demonstrated by the research of Harry and Margaret Harlow. From 1957 to 1963, the Harlows conducted a series of experiments studying how rhesus monkeys, which behave a lot like people, are affected by isolation as babies. They studied monkeys raised under two types of "substitute" mothering circumstances: a mesh and wire sculpture, or a soft terrycloth "mother." The monkeys systematically preferred the company of a soft, terrycloth substitute mother (closely resembling a rhesus monkey) that was unable to feed them, to a mesh and wire mother that provided sustenance via a feeding tube. This demonstrated that while food was important, social comfort was of greater value (Harlow and Harlow 1962; Harlow 1971). Later experiments testing more severe isolation revealed that such deprivation of social contact led to significant developmental and social challenges later in life.



Baby rhesus monkeys, like humans, need to be raised with social contact for healthy development. (Photo courtesy of Paul Asman and Jill Lenoble/flickr)

In the following sections, we will examine the importance of the complex process of socialization and how it takes place through interaction with many individuals, groups, and social institutions. We will explore how socialization is not only critical to children as they develop, but how it is a lifelong process through which we become prepared for new social environments and expectations in every stage of our lives. But first, we will turn to scholarship about self development, the process of coming to recognize a sense of self, a “self” that is then able to be socialized.

References

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Glossary

socialization

the process wherein people come to understand societal norms and expectations, to accept society's beliefs, and to be aware of societal values

Theories of Self Development

- Understand the difference between psychological and sociological theories of self development
- Explain the process of moral development

When we are born, we have a genetic makeup and biological traits. However, who we are as human beings develops through social interaction. Many scholars, both in the fields of psychology and in sociology, have described the process of self development as a precursor to understanding how that “self” becomes socialized.

Psychological Perspectives on Self-Development

Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was one of the most influential modern scientists to put forth a theory about how people develop a sense of self. He believed that personality and sexual development were closely linked, and he divided the maturation process into psychosexual stages: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital. He posited that people’s self development is closely linked to early stages of development, like breastfeeding, toilet training, and sexual awareness (Freud 1905).

According to Freud, failure to properly engage in or disengage from a specific stage results in emotional and psychological consequences throughout adulthood. An adult with an oral fixation may indulge in overeating or binge drinking. An anal fixation may produce a neat freak (hence the term “anal retentive”), while a person stuck in the phallic stage may be promiscuous or emotionally immature. Although no solid empirical evidence supports Freud’s theory, his ideas continue to contribute to the work of scholars in a variety of disciplines.

Note:

Sociology or Psychology: What’s the Difference?

You might be wondering: if sociologists and psychologists are both interested in people and their behavior, how are these two disciplines

different? What do they agree on, and where do their ideas diverge? The answers are complicated, but the distinction is important to scholars in both fields.

As a general difference, we might say that while both disciplines are interested in human behavior, psychologists are focused on how the mind influences that behavior, while sociologists study the role of society in shaping behavior. Psychologists are interested in people's mental development and how their minds process their world. Sociologists are more likely to focus on how different aspects of society contribute to an individual's relationship with his world. Another way to think of the difference is that psychologists tend to look inward (mental health, emotional processes), while sociologists tend to look outward (social institutions, cultural norms, interactions with others) to understand human behavior.

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) was the first to make this distinction in research, when he attributed differences in suicide rates among people to social causes (religious differences) rather than to psychological causes (like their mental wellbeing) (Durkheim 1897). Today, we see this same distinction. For example, a sociologist studying how a couple gets to the point of their first kiss on a date might focus her research on cultural norms for dating, social patterns of sexual activity over time, or how this process is different for seniors than for teens. A psychologist would more likely be interested in the person's earliest sexual awareness or the mental processing of sexual desire.

Sometimes sociologists and psychologists have collaborated to increase knowledge. In recent decades, however, their fields have become more clearly separated as sociologists increasingly focus on large societal issues and patterns, while psychologists remain honed in on the human mind. Both disciplines make valuable contributions through different approaches that provide us with different types of useful insights.

Psychologist Erik Erikson (1902–1994) created a theory of personality development based, in part, on the work of Freud. However, Erikson believed the personality continued to change over time and was never truly finished. His theory includes eight stages of development, beginning with

birth and ending with death. According to Erikson, people move through these stages throughout their lives. In contrast to Freud's focus on psychosexual stages and basic human urges, Erikson's view of self development gave credit to more social aspects, like the way we negotiate between our own base desires and what is socially accepted (Erikson 1982).

Jean Piaget (1896–1980) was a psychologist who specialized in child development, focusing specifically on the role of social interactions in their development. He recognized that the development of self evolved through a negotiation between the world as it exists in one's mind and the world that exists as it is experienced socially (Piaget 1954). All three of these thinkers have contributed to our modern understanding of self development.

Sociological Theories of Self Development

One of the pioneering contributors to sociological perspectives was Charles Cooley (1864–1929). He asserted that people's self understanding is constructed, in part, by their perception of how others view them—a process termed “the looking glass self” (Cooley 1902).

Later, George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) studied the **self**, a person's distinct identity that is developed through social interaction. In order to engage in this process of “self,” an individual has to be able to view him or herself through the eyes of others. That's not an ability that we are born with (Mead 1934). The case of Danielle, for example, illustrates what happens when social interaction is absent from early experience: she had no ability to see herself as others would see her. From Mead's point of view, she had no “self.”

How do we get from being newborns to being humans with “selves?” Mead believed that there is a specific path of development that all people go through. During the preparatory stage, children are only capable of imitation: they have no ability to imagine how others see things. They copy the actions of people with whom they regularly interact, such as their mothers and fathers. This is followed by the play stage, during which children begin to take on the role that one other person might have. Thus, children might try on a parent's point of view by acting out “grownup”

behavior, like playing “dress up” and acting out the “mom” role, or talking on a toy telephone the way they see their father do.

During the game stage, children learn to consider several roles at the same time and how those roles interact with each other. They learn to understand interactions involving different people with a variety of purposes. For example, a child at this is likely to be aware of the different responsibilities of people in a restaurant who together make for a smooth dining experience (someone seats you, another takes your order, someone else cooks the food, while yet another clears away dirty dishes).

Finally, children develop, understand, and learn the idea of the **generalized other**, the common behavioral expectations of general society. By this stage of development, an individual is able to imagine how he or she is viewed by one or many others—and thus, from a sociological perspective, to have a “self” (Mead 1934; Mead 1964).

Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development

Moral development is an important part of the socialization process. The term refers to the way people learn what society considered to be “good” and “bad,” which is important for a smoothly functioning society. Moral development prevents people from acting on unchecked urges, instead considering what is right for society and good for others. Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987) was interested in how people learn to decide what is right and what is wrong. To understand this topic, he developed a theory of moral development that includes three levels: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional.

In the preconventional stage, young children, who lack a higher level of cognitive ability, experience the world around them only through their senses. It isn’t until the teen years that the conventional theory develops, when youngsters become increasingly aware of others’ feelings and take those into consideration when determining what’s “good” and “bad.” The final stage, called postconventional, is when people begin to think of morality in abstract terms, such as Americans believing that everyone has

the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. At this stage, people also recognize that legality and morality do not always match up evenly (Kohlberg 1981). When hundreds of thousands of Egyptians turned out in 2011 to protest government corruption, they were using postconventional morality. They understood that although their government was legal, it was not morally correct.

Gilligan's Theory of Moral Development and Gender

Another sociologist, Carol Gilligan (1936–), recognized that Kohlberg's theory might show gender bias since his research was only conducted on male subjects. Would female study subjects have responded differently? Would a female social scientist notice different patterns when analyzing the research? To answer the first question, she set out to study differences between how boys and girls developed morality. Gilligan's research demonstrated that boys and girls do, in fact, have different understandings of morality. Boys tend to have a justice perspective, placing emphasis on rules and laws. Girls, on the other hand, have a care and responsibility perspective; they consider people's reasons behind behavior that seems morally wrong.

Gilligan also recognized that Kohlberg's theory rested on the assumption that the justice perspective was the right, or better, perspective. Gilligan, in contrast, theorized that neither perspective was "better": the two norms of justice served different purposes. Ultimately, she explained that boys are socialized for a work environment where rules make operations run smoothly, while girls are socialized for a home environment where flexibility allows for harmony in caretaking and nurturing (Gilligan 1982; Gilligan 1990).

Note:

What a Pretty Little Lady!

"What a cute dress!" "I like the ribbons in your hair." "Wow, you look so pretty today."

According to Lisa Bloom, author of *Think: Straight Talk for Women to Stay Smart in a Dumbed Down World*, most of us use pleasantries like these when we first meet little girls. “So what?” you might ask.

Bloom asserts that we are too focused on the appearance of young girls, and as a result, our society is socializing them to believe that how they look is of vital importance. And Bloom may be on to something. How often do you tell a little boy how attractive his outfit is, how nice looking his shoes are, or how handsome he looks today? To support her assertions, Bloom cites, as one example, that about 50 percent of girls ages three to six worry about being fat (Bloom 2011). We’re talking kindergarteners who are concerned about their body image. Sociologists are acutely interested in of this type of gender socialization, where societal expectations of how boys and girls should *be*—how they should behave, what toys and colors they should like, and how important their attire is—are reinforced.

One solution to this type of gender socialization is being experimented with at the Egalia preschool in Sweden, where children develop in a genderless environment. All of the children at Egalia are referred to with neutral terms like “friend” instead of “he” or “she.” Play areas and toys are consciously set up to eliminate any reinforcement of gender expectations (Haney 2011). Egalia strives to eliminate all societal gender norms from these children’s preschool world.

Extreme? Perhaps. So what is the middle ground? Bloom suggests that we start with simple steps: when introduced to a young girl, ask about her favorite book or what she likes. In short, engage her mind ... not her outward appearance (Bloom 2011).

Summary

Psychological theories of self development have been broadened by sociologists who explicitly study the role of society and social interaction in self development. Charles Cooley and George Mead both contributed significantly to the sociological understanding of the development of self. Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan developed their ideas further, researching how our sense of morality develops. Gilligan added the dimension of gender differences to Kohlberg’s theory.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: Socialization, as a sociological term, describes:

- a. how people interact during social situations
- b. how people learn societal norms, beliefs, and values
- c. a person's internal mental state when in a group setting
- d. the difference between introverts and extroverts

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem: The Harlows' study on rhesus monkeys showed that:

- a. rhesus monkeys raised by other primate species are poorly socialized
- b. monkeys can be adequately socialized by imitating humans
- c. food is more important than social comfort
- d. social comfort is more important than food

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem: What occurs in Lawrence Kohlberg's conventional level?

- a. Children develop the ability to have abstract thoughts.

- b. Morality is developed by pain and pleasure.
 - c. Children begin to consider what society considers moral and immoral.
 - d. Parental beliefs have no influence on children's morality.
-

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

What did Carol Gilligan believe earlier researchers into morality had overlooked?

- a. The justice perspective
 - b. Sympathetic reactions to moral situations
 - c. The perspective of females
 - d. How social environment affects how morality develops
-

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

What is one way to distinguish between psychology and sociology?

- a. Psychology focuses on the mind, while sociology focuses on society.
- b. Psychologists are interested in mental health, while sociologists are interested in societal functions.

- c. Psychologists look inward to understand behavior while sociologists look outward.
 - d. All of the above
-

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

How did nearly complete isolation as a child affect Danielle's verbal abilities?

- a. She could not communicate at all.
 - b. She never learned words, but she did learn signs.
 - c. She could not understand much, but she could use gestures.
 - d. She could understand and use basic language like "yes" and "no."
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Think of a current issue or pattern that a sociologist might study. What types of questions would the sociologist ask, and what research methods might he employ? Now consider the questions and methods a psychologist might use to study the same issue. Comment on their different approaches.

Exercise:

Problem:

Explain why it's important to conduct research using both male and female participants. What sociological topics might show gender differences? Provide some examples to illustrate your ideas.

Further Research

Lawrence Kohlberg was most famous for his research using moral dilemmas. He presented dilemmas to boys and asked them how they would judge the situations. Visit <http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Dilemma> to read about Kohlberg's most famous moral dilemma, known as the Heinz dilemma.

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Glossary

generalized other

the common behavioral expectations of general society

moral development

the way people learn what is "good" and "bad" in society

self

a person's distinct sense of identity as developed through social interaction

Why Socialization Matters

- Understand the importance of socialization both for individuals and society
- Explain the nature versus nurture debate

Socialization is critical both to individuals and to the societies in which they live. It illustrates how completely intertwined human beings and their social worlds are. First, it is through teaching culture to new members that a society perpetuates itself. If new generations of a society don't learn its way of life, it ceases to exist. Whatever is distinctive about a culture must be transmitted to those who join it in order for a society to survive. For American culture to continue, for example, children in the United States must learn about cultural values related to democracy: they have to learn the norms of voting, as well as how to use material objects such as voting machines. Of course, some would argue that it's just as important in American culture for the younger generation to learn the etiquette of eating in a restaurant or the rituals of tailgate parties at football games. In fact, there are many ideas and objects that Americans teach children in hopes of keeping the society's way of life going through another generation.



Socialization teaches us our society's expectations for dining out. The manners and customs of different cultures (When can you use your hands to eat? How should you compliment the cook? Who is the "head" of the table?) are learned through

socialization. (Photo courtesy of
Niyam Bhushan/flickr)

Socialization is just as essential to us as individuals. Social interaction provides the means via which we gradually become able to see ourselves through the eyes of others, learning who we are and how we fit into the world around us. In addition, to function successfully in society, we have to learn the basics of both material and nonmaterial culture, everything from how to dress ourselves to what's suitable attire for a specific occasion; from when we sleep to what we sleep on; and from what's considered appropriate to eat for dinner to how to use the stove to prepare it. Most importantly, we have to learn language—whether it's the dominant language or one common in a subculture, whether it's verbal or through signs—in order to communicate and to think. As we saw with Danielle, without socialization we literally have no self.

Nature versus Nurture

Some experts assert that who we are is a result of **nurture**—the relationships and caring that surround us. Others argue that who we are is based entirely in genetics. According to this belief, our temperaments, interests, and talents are set before birth. From this perspective, then, who we are depends on **nature**.

One way that researchers attempt to prove the impact of nature is by studying twins. Some studies followed identical twins who were raised separately. The pairs shared the same genetics, but, in some cases, were socialized in different ways. Instances of this type of situation are rare, but studying the degree to which identical twins raised apart are the same and different can give researchers insight into how our temperaments, preferences, and abilities are shaped by our genetic makeup versus our social environment.

For example, in 1968, twin girls born to a mentally ill mother were put up for adoption. However, they were also separated from each other and raised

in different households. The parents, and certainly the babies, did not realize they were one of five pairs of twins who were made subjects of a scientific study (Flam 2007).

In 2003, the two women, then age 35, reunited. Elyse Schein and Paula Bernstein sat together in awe, feeling like they were looking into a mirror. Not only did they look alike, but they behaved alike, using the same hand gestures and facial expressions (Spratling 2007). Studies like these point to the genetic roots of our temperament and behavior.

Though genetics and hormones play an important role in human behavior, sociology's larger concern is the effect that society has on human behavior, the "nurture" side of the nature versus nurture debate. What race were the twins? From what social class were their parents? What about gender? Religion? All of these factors affect the lives of the twins as much as their genetic makeup and are critical to consider as we look at life through the sociological lens.

Note:

The Life of Chris Langan, the Smartest Man You've Never Heard Of Bouncer. Firefighter. Factory worker. Cowboy. Chris Langan spent the majority of his adult life just getting by with jobs like these. He had no college degree, few resources, and a past filled with much disappointment. Chris Langan also had an IQ of over 195, nearly 100 points higher than the average person (Brabham 2001). So why didn't Chris become a neurosurgeon, professor, or aeronautical engineer? According to Malcolm Gladwell (2008) in his book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Chris didn't possess the set of social skills necessary to succeed on such a high level—skills that aren't innate, but learned.

Gladwell looked to a recent study conducted by sociologist Annette Lareau in which she closely shadowed 12 families from various economic backgrounds and examined their parenting techniques. Parents from lower income families followed a strategy of "accomplishment of natural growth," which is to say they let their children develop on their own with a large amount of independence; parents from higher income families, however, "actively fostered and accessed a child's talents, opinions, and

skills” (Gladwell 2008). These parents were more likely to engage in analytical conversation, encourage active questioning of the establishment, and foster development of negotiation skills. The parents were also able to introduce their children to a wide range of activities, from sports to music to accelerated academic programs. When one middle class child was denied entry to a gifted and talented program, the mother petitioned the school and arranged additional testing until her daughter was admitted. Lower income parents, however, were more likely to unquestioningly obey authorities such as school boards. Their children were not being socialized to comfortably confront the system and speak up (Gladwell 2008).

What does this have to do with Chris Langan, deemed by some as the smartest man in the world (Brabham 2001)? Chris was born in severe poverty, moving across the country with an abusive and alcoholic stepfather. Chris’s genius went greatly unnoticed. After accepting a full scholarship to Reed College, his funding was revoked after his mother failed to fill out necessary paperwork. Unable to successfully make his case to the administration, Chris, who had received straight A’s the previous semester, was given F’s on his transcript and forced to drop out. After enrolling in Montana State, an administrator’s refusal to rearrange his class schedule left him unable to find the means necessary to travel the 16 miles to attend classes. What Chris had in brilliance, he lacked practical intelligence, or what psychologist Robert Sternberg defines as “knowing what to say to whom, knowing when to say it, and knowing how to say it for maximum effect” (Sternberg et al. 2000). Such knowledge was never part of his socialization.

Chris gave up on school and began working an array of blue-collar jobs, pursuing his intellectual interests on the side. Though he’s recently garnered attention from work on his “Cognitive Theoretic Model of the Universe,” he remains weary and resistant of the educational system. As Gladwell concluded, “He’d had to make his way alone, and no one—not rock stars, not professional athletes, not software billionaires, and not even geniuses—ever makes it alone” (2008).



Identical twins may look alike, but their differences can give us clues to the effects of socialization.
(Photo courtesy of D. Flam/flickr)

Sociologists all recognize the importance of socialization for healthy individual and societal development. But how do scholars working in the three major theoretical paradigms approach this topic? Structural functionalists would say that socialization is essential to society, both because it trains members to operate successfully within it and because it perpetuates culture by transmitting it to new generations. Without socialization, a society's culture would perish as members died off. A conflict theorist might argue that socialization reproduces inequality from generation to generation by conveying different expectations and norms to those with different social characteristics. For example, individuals are socialized differently by gender, social class, and race. As in the illustration of Chris Langan, this creates different (unequal) opportunities. An

interactionist studying socialization is concerned with face-to-face exchanges and symbolic communication. For example, dressing baby boys in blue and baby girls in pink is one small way that messages are conveyed about differences in gender roles.

Summary

Socialization is important because it helps uphold societies and cultures; it is also a key part of individual development. Research demonstrates that who we are is affected by both nature (our genetic and hormonal makeup) and nurture (the social environment in which we are raised). Sociology is most concerned with the way that society's influence affects our behavior patterns, made clear by the way behavior varies across class and gender.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Why do sociologists need to be careful when drawing conclusions from twin studies?

- a. The results do not apply to singletons.
- b. The twins were often raised in different ways.
- c. The twins may turn out to actually be fraternal.
- d. The sample sizes are often small.

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

From a sociological perspective, which factor does not greatly influence a person's socialization?

- a. Gender
 - b. Class
 - c. Blood type
 - d. Race
-

Solution:**Answer**

C

Exercise:

Problem: Chris Langan's story illustrates that:

- a. children raised in one-parent households tend to have higher IQs.
 - b. intelligence is more important than socialization.
 - c. socialization can be more important than intelligence.
 - d. neither socialization nor intelligence affects college admissions.
-

Solution:**Answer**

C

Short Answer**Exercise:**

Problem:

Why are twin studies an important way to learn about the relative effects of genetics and socialization on children? What questions about human development do you believe twin studies are best for answering? For what types of questions would twin studies not be as helpful?

Exercise:**Problem:**

Why do you think that people like Chris Langan continue to have difficulty even after they are helped through societal systems? What is it they've missed that prevents them from functioning successfully in the social world?

Further Research

Learn more about five other sets of twins who grew up apart and discovered each other later in life at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/twins>

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Glossary

nature

the influence of our genetic makeup on self-development

nurture

the role that our social environment plays in self-development

Agents of Socialization

- Learn the roles of families and peer groups in socialization
- Understand how we are socialized through formal institutions like schools, workplaces, and the government

Socialization helps people learn to function successfully in their social worlds. How does the process of socialization occur? How do we learn to use the objects of our society's material culture? How do we come to adopt the beliefs, values, and norms that represent its nonmaterial culture? This learning takes place through interaction with various agents of socialization, like peer groups and families, plus both formal and informal social institutions.

Social Group Agents

Social groups often provide the first experiences of socialization. Families, and later peer groups, communicate expectations and reinforce norms. People first learn to use the tangible objects of material culture in these settings, as well as being introduced to the beliefs and values of society.

Family

Family is the first agent of socialization. Mothers and fathers, siblings and grandparents, plus members of an extended family, all teach a child what he or she needs to know. For example, they show the child how to use objects (such as clothes, computers, eating utensils, books, bikes); how to relate to others (some as "family," others as "friends," still others as "strangers" or "teachers" or "neighbors"); and how the world works (what is "real" and what is "imagined"). As you are aware, either from your own experience as a child or your role in helping to raise one, socialization involves teaching and learning about an unending array of objects and ideas.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that families do not socialize children in a vacuum. Many social factors impact how a family raises its children. For example, we can use sociological imagination to recognize

that individual behaviors are affected by the historical period in which they take place. Sixty years ago, it would not have been considered especially strict for a father to hit his son with a wooden spoon or a belt if he misbehaved, but today that same action might be considered child abuse.

Sociologists recognize that race, social class, religion, and other societal factors play an important role in socialization. For example, poor families usually emphasize obedience and conformity when raising their children, while wealthy families emphasize judgment and creativity (National Opinion Research Center 2008). This may be because working-class parents have less education and more repetitive-task jobs for which the ability to follow rules and to conform helps. Wealthy parents tend to have better educations and often work in managerial positions or in careers that require creative problem solving, so they teach their children behaviors that would be beneficial in these positions. This means that children are effectively socialized and raised to take the types of jobs that their parents already have, thus reproducing the class system (Kohn 1977). Likewise, children are socialized to abide by gender norms, perceptions of race, and class-related behaviors.

In Sweden, for instance, stay-at-home fathers are an accepted part of the social landscape. A government policy provides subsidized time off work—480 days for families with newborns—with the option of the paid leave being shared between both mothers and fathers. As one stay-at-home dad says, being home to take care of his baby son “is a real fatherly thing to do. I think that’s very masculine” (Associated Press 2011). How do America’s policies—and our society’s expected gender roles—compare? How will Swedish children raised this way be socialized to parental gender norms? How might that be different from parental gender norms in the United States?



The socialized roles of dads
(and moms) vary by society.
(Photo courtesy of Nate
Grigg/flickr)

Peer Groups

A **peer group** is made up of people who are similar in age and social status and who share interests. Peer group socialization begins in the earliest years, such as when kids on a playground teach younger children the norms about taking turns or the rules of a game or how to shoot a basket. As children grow into teenagers, this process continues. Peer groups are important to adolescents in a new way, as they begin to develop an identity separate from their parents and exert independence. Additionally, peer groups provide their own opportunities for socialization since kids usually engage in different types of activities with their peers than they do with their families. Peer groups provide adolescents' first major socialization experience outside the realm of their families. Interestingly, studies have shown that although friendships rank high in adolescents' priorities, this is balanced by parental influence.

Institutional Agents

The social institutions of our culture also inform our socialization. Formal institutions—like schools, workplaces, and the government—teach people how to behave in and navigate these systems. Other institutions, like the media, contribute to socialization by inundating us with messages about norms and expectations.

School

Most American children spend about seven hours a day, 180 days a year, in school, which makes it hard to deny the importance school has on their socialization (U.S. Department of Education 2004). Students are not only in school to study math, reading, science, and other subjects—the manifest function of this system. Schools also serve a latent function in society by socializing children into behaviors like teamwork, following a schedule, and using textbooks.



These
kindergarteners
aren't just

learning to read
and write, they
are being
socialized to
norms like
keeping their
hands to
themselves,
standing in line,
and reciting the
Pledge of
Allegiance.
(Photo courtesy
of Bonner
Springs
Library/flickr)

School and classroom rituals, led by teachers serving as role models and leaders, regularly reinforce what society expects from children. Sociologists describe this aspect of schools as the **hidden curriculum**, the informal teaching done by schools.

For example, in the United States, schools have built a sense of competition into the way grades are awarded and the way teachers evaluate students (Bowles and Gintis 1976). When children participate in a relay race or a math contest, they learn that there are winners and losers in society. When children are required to work together on a project, they practice teamwork with other people in cooperative situations. The hidden curriculum prepares children for the adult world. Children learn how to deal with bureaucracy, rules, expectations, waiting their turn, and sitting still for hours during the day. Schools in different cultures socialize children differently in order to prepare them to function well in those cultures. The latent functions of teamwork and dealing with bureaucracy are features of American culture.

Schools also socialize children by teaching them about citizenship and national pride. In the United States, children are taught to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Most districts require classes about U.S. history and geography. As academic understanding of history evolves, textbooks in the United States have been scrutinized and revised to update attitudes toward other cultures as well as perspectives on historical events; thus, children are socialized to a different national or world history than earlier textbooks may have done. For example, information about the mistreatment of African Americans and Native American Indians more accurately reflects those events than in textbooks of the past.

Note:

Controversial Textbooks

On August 13, 2001, 20 South Korean men gathered in Seoul. Each chopped off one of his own fingers because of textbooks. These men took drastic measures to protest eight middle school textbooks approved by Tokyo for use in Japanese middle schools. According to the Korean government (and other East Asian nations), the textbooks glossed over negative events in Japan's history at the expense of other Asian countries. In the early 1900s, Japan was one of Asia's more aggressive nations. Korea was held as a colony by the Japanese between 1910 and 1945. Today, Koreans argue that the Japanese are whitewashing that colonial history through these textbooks. One major criticism is that they do not mention that, during World War II, the Japanese forced Korean women into sexual slavery. The textbooks describe the women as having been "drafted" to work, a euphemism that downplays the brutality of what actually occurred. Some Japanese textbooks dismiss an important Korean independence demonstration in 1919 as a "riot." In reality, Japanese soldiers attacked peaceful demonstrators, leaving roughly 6,000 dead and 15,000 wounded (Crampton 2002).

Although it may seem extreme that people are so enraged about how events are described in a textbook that they would resort to dismemberment, the protest affirms that textbooks are a significant tool of socialization in state-run education systems.

The Workplace

Just as children spend much of their day at school, many American adults at some point invest a significant amount of time at a place of employment. Although socialized into their culture since birth, workers require new socialization into a workplace, both in terms of material culture (such as how to operate the copy machine) and nonmaterial culture (such as whether it's okay to speak directly to the boss or how the refrigerator is shared).

Different jobs require different types of socialization. In the past, many people worked a single job until retirement. Today, the trend is to switch jobs at least once a decade. Between the ages of 18 and 44, the average baby boomer of the younger set held 11 different jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). This means that people must become socialized to, and socialized by, a variety of work environments.

Religion

While some religions may tend toward being an informal institution, this section focuses on practices related to formal institutions. Religion is an important avenue of socialization for many people. The United States is full of synagogues, temples, churches, mosques, and similar religious communities where people gather to worship and learn. Like other institutions, these places teach participants how to interact with the religion's material culture (like a mezuzah, a prayer rug, or a communion wafer). For some people, important ceremonies related to family structure—like marriage and birth—are connected to religious celebrations. Many of these institutions uphold gender norms and contribute to their enforcement through socialization. From ceremonial rites of passage that reinforce the family unit, to power dynamics which reinforce gender roles, religion fosters a shared set of socialized values that are passed on through society.

Government

Although we do not think about it, many of the rites of passage people go through today are based on age norms established by the government. To be defined as an “adult” usually means being 18 years old, the age at which a person becomes legally responsible for themselves. And 65 is the start of “old age” since most people become eligible for senior benefits at that point.

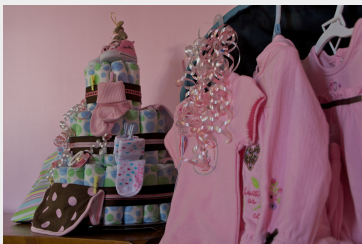
Each time we embark on one of these new categories—senior, adult, taxpayer—we must be socialized into this new role. Seniors must learn the ropes of Medicare, Social Security benefits, and getting a senior discount where they shop. When American males turn 18, they must register with the Selective Service System within 30 days to be entered into a database for possible military service. These government dictates mark the points at which we require socialization into a new category.

Mass Media

Mass media refers to the distribution of impersonal information to a wide audience, such as what happens via television, newspapers, radio, and the Internet. With the average person spending over four hours a day in front of the TV (and children averaging even more screen time), media greatly influences social norms (Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout 2005). People learn about objects of material culture (like new technology and transportation options), as well as nonmaterial culture—what is true (beliefs), what is important (values), and what is expected (norms).

Note:

Girls and Movies



Some people are
concerned about
the way girls
today are
socialized into a
“princess
culture.” (Photo
courtesy of Emily
Stanchfield/flickr
)

Pixar is one of the largest producers of children’s movies in the world and has released large box office draws, such as *Toy Story*, *Cars*, *The Incredibles*, and *Up*. What Pixar has never before produced is a movie with a female lead role. This will change with Pixar’s newest movie *Brave*, which is due out in 2012. Before *Brave*, women in Pixar served as supporting characters and love interests. In *Up*, for example, the only human female character dies within the first 10 minutes of the film. For the millions of girls watching Pixar films, there are few strong characters or roles for them to relate to. If they do not see possible versions of themselves, they may come to view women as secondary to the lives of men.

The animated films of Pixar’s parent company, Disney, have many female lead roles. Disney is well known for films with female leads, such as *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Mulan*. Many of Disney’s movies star a female, and she is nearly always a princess figure. If she is not a princess to begin with, she typically ends the movie by marrying a prince or, in the case of *Mulan*, a military general. Although not all “princesses” in Disney movies play a passive role in their lives, they typically find themselves needing to be rescued by a man, and the happy ending they all search for includes marriage.

Alongside this prevalence of princesses, many parents are expressing concern about the culture of princesses that Disney has created. Peggy Orenstein addresses this problem in her popular book, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*. Orenstein wonders why every little girl is expected to be a “princess” and why pink has become an all-consuming obsession for many

young girls. Another mother wondered what she did wrong when her three-year-old daughter refused to do “non-princessy” things, including running and jumping. The effects of this princess culture can have negative consequences for girls throughout life. An early emphasis on beauty and sexiness can lead to eating disorders, low self-esteem, and risky sexual behavior among older girls.

What should we expect from Pixar’s new movie, the first starring a female character? Although *Brave* features a female lead, she is still a princess. Will this film offer any new type of role model for young girls? (O’Connor 2011; Barnes 2010; Rose 2011).

Summary

Our direct interactions with social groups, like families and peers, teach us how others expect us to behave. Likewise, a society’s formal and informal institutions socialize its population. Schools, workplaces, and the media communicate and reinforce cultural norms and values.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Why are wealthy parents more likely than poor parents to socialize their children toward creativity and problem solving?

- a. Wealthy parents are socializing their children toward the skills of white-collar employment.
- b. Wealthy parents are not concerned about their children rebelling against their rules.
- c. Wealthy parents never engage in repetitive tasks.
- d. Wealthy parents are more concerned with money than with a good education.

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

How do schools prepare children to one day enter the workforce?

- a. With a standardized curriculum
- b. Through the hidden curriculum
- c. By socializing them in teamwork
- d. All of the above

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

Which one of the following is *not* a way people are socialized by religion?

- a. People learn the material culture of their religion.
- b. Life stages and roles are connected to religious celebration.
- c. An individual's personal internal experience of a divine being leads to their faith.
- d. Places of worship provide a space for shared group experiences.

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem: Which of the following is a manifest function of schools?

- a. Understanding when to speak up and when to be silent
 - b. Learning to read and write
 - c. Following a schedule
 - d. Knowing locker room etiquette
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following is typically the earliest agent of socialization?

- a. School
 - b. Family
 - c. Mass media
 - d. Workplace
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Do you think it is important that parents discuss gender roles with their young children, or is gender a topic better left for later? How do parents consider gender norms when buying their children books, movies, and toys? How do you believe they *should* consider it?

Exercise:**Problem:**

Based on your observations, when are adolescents more likely to listen to their parents or to their peer groups when making decisions? What types of dilemmas lend themselves toward one social agent over another?

Further Research

Most societies expect parents to socialize children into gender norms. See the controversy surrounding one Canadian couple's refusal to do so at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Baby-Storm>

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Glossary

hidden curriculum

the informal teaching done in schools that socializes children to societal norms

peer group

a group made up of people who are similar in age and social status and who share interests

Socialization Across the Life Course

- Explain how socialization occurs and recurs throughout life
- Understand how people are socialized into new roles at age-related transition points
- Describe when and how resocialization occurs

Socialization isn't a one-time or even a short-term event. We aren't "stamped" by some socialization machine as we move along a conveyor belt and thereby socialized once and for all. In fact, socialization is a lifelong process.

In the United States, socialization throughout the life course is determined greatly by age norms and "time-related rules and regulations" (Setterson 2002). As we grow older, we encounter age-related transition points that require socialization into a new role, such as becoming school age, entering the workforce, or retiring. For example, the U.S. government mandates that all children attend school. Child labor laws, enacted in the early 20th century, nationally declared that childhood be a time of learning, not of labor. In countries such as Niger and Sierra Leone, however, child labor remains common and socially acceptable, with little legislation to regulate such practices (UNICEF 2011).

Note:

Gap Year: How Different Societies Socialize Young Adults



Age transition points require socialization into new roles that can vary widely between societies. Young adults in America are encouraged to enter college or the workforce right away, students in England and India can take a year off like Princes William and Harry did, while young men in Singapore and Switzerland must serve time in the military. (Photo courtesy of Charles McCain/flickr)

Have you ever heard of gap year? It's a common custom in British society. When teens finish their secondary schooling (aka high school in the United States), they often take a year "off" before entering college. Frequently, they might take a job, travel, or find other ways to experience another culture. Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, spent his gap year practicing survival skills in Belize, teaching English in Chile, and working on a dairy farm in the United Kingdom (Prince of Wales 2012a). His brother, Prince Harry, advocated for AIDS orphans in Africa and worked as a jackeroo (a novice ranch hand) in Australia (Prince of Wales 2012b). In the United States, this life transition point is socialized quite differently, and taking a year off is generally frowned upon. Instead, American youth are encouraged to pick career paths by their mid-teens, to select a college and a major by their late teens, and to have completed all collegiate schooling or technical training for their career by their early 20s.

In yet other nations, this phase of the life course is tied into conscription, a term that describes compulsory military service. Egypt, Switzerland, Turkey, and Singapore all have this system in place. Youth in these nations (often only the males) are expected to undergo a number of months or years of military training and service.

How might your life be different if you lived in one of these other countries? Can you think of similar social norms—related to life age-transition points—that vary from country to country?

Many of life's social expectations are made clear and enforced on a cultural level. Through interacting with others and watching others interact, the expectation to fulfill roles becomes clear. While in elementary or middle school, the prospect of having a boyfriend or girlfriend may have been considered undesirable. The socialization that takes place in high school changes the expectation. By observing the excitement and importance attached to dating and relationships within the high school social scene, it quickly becomes apparent that one is now expected not only to be a child and a student, but a significant other as well. Graduation from formal education—high school, vocational school, or college—involves socialization into a new set of expectations.

Educational expectations vary not only from culture to culture, but from class to class. While middle or upper class families may expect their daughter or son to attend a four-year university after graduating from high school, other families may expect their child to immediately begin working full-time, as many within their family have done before.

Note:

The Long Road to Adulthood for Millennials

2008 was a year of financial upheaval in the United States. Rampant foreclosures and bank failures set off a chain of events sparking government distrust, loan defaults, and large-scale unemployment. How has this affected America's young adults?

Millennials, sometimes also called Gen Y, is a term that describes the generation born during the early eighties to early nineties. While the recession was in full swing, many were in the process of entering, attending, or graduating from high school and college. With employment prospects at historical lows, large numbers of graduates were unable to find work, sometimes moving back in with their parents and struggling to pay back student loans.

According to the *New York Times*, this economic stall is causing the Millennials to postpone what most Americans consider to be adulthood: “The traditional cycle seems to have gone off course, as young people remain untethered to romantic partners or to permanent homes, going back to school for lack of better options, traveling, avoiding commitments, competing ferociously for unpaid internships or temporary (and often grueling) Teach for America jobs, forestalling the beginning of adult life” (Henig 2010).

The five milestones, Henig writes, that define adulthood, are “completing school, leaving home, becoming financially independent, marrying, and having a child” (Henig 2010). These social milestones are taking longer for Millennials to attain, if they’re attained at all. Sociologists wonder what long-term impact this generation’s situation may have on society as a whole.

In the process of socialization, adulthood brings a new set of challenges and expectations, as well as new roles to fill. As the aging process moves forward, social roles continue to evolve. Pleasures of youth, such as wild nights out and serial dating, become less acceptable in the eyes of society. Responsibility and commitment are emphasized as pillars of adulthood, and men and women are expected to “settle down.” During this period, many people enter into marriage or a civil union, bring children into their families, and focus on a career path. They become partners or parents instead of students or significant others.

Just as young children pretend to be doctors or lawyers, play house, and dress up, adults also engage **anticipatory socialization**, the preparation for future life roles. Examples would include a couple who cohabitate before

marriage, or soon-to-be parents who read infant care books and prepare their home for the new arrival. As part of anticipatory socialization, adults who are financially able begin planning for their retirement, saving money and looking into future health care options. The transition into any new life role, despite the social structure that supports it, can be difficult.

Resocialization

In the process of **resocialization**, old behaviors that were helpful in a previous role are removed because they are no longer of use.

Resocialization is necessary when a person moves to a senior care center, goes to boarding school, or serves time in jail. In the new environment, the old rules no longer apply. The process of resocialization is typically more stressful than normal socialization because people have to unlearn behaviors that have become customary to them.

The most common way resocialization occurs is in a total institution where people are isolated from society and are forced to follow someone else's rules. A ship at sea is a total institution, as are religious convents, prisons, or some cult organizations. They are places cut off from a larger society. The 7.1 million Americans who lived in prisons or penitentiaries at the end of 2010 are also members of this type of institution (U.S. Department of Justice 2011). As another example, every branch of the military is a total institution.

Many individuals are resocialized into an institution through a two-part process. First, members entering an institution must leave behind their old identity through what is known as a degradation ceremony. In a **degradation ceremony**, new members lose the aspects of their old identity and are given new identities. The process is sometimes gentle. To enter a senior care home, an elderly person often must leave a family home and give up many belongings which were part of his or her long-standing identity. Though caretakers guide the elderly compassionately, the process can still be one of loss. In many cults, this process is also gentle and happens in an environment of support and caring.

In other situations, the degradation ceremony can be more extreme. New prisoners lose freedom, rights (including the right to privacy), and personal belongings. When entering the army, soldiers have their hair cut short. Their old clothes are removed and they wear matching uniforms. These individuals must give up any markers of their former identity in order to be resocialized into an identity as a “soldier.”



In basic training, members of the Air Force are taught to walk, move, and look like each other. (Photo courtesy of Staff Sergeant Desiree N. Palacios, U.S. Air Force/Wikimedia Commons)

After new members of an institution are stripped of their old identity, they build a new one that matches the new society. In the military, soldiers go through basic training together, where they learn new rules and bond with one another. They follow structured schedules set by their leaders. Soldiers must keep their areas clean for inspection, learn to march in correct formations, and salute when in the presence of superiors.

Learning to deal with life after having lived in a total institution requires yet another process of resocialization. In the U.S. military, soldiers learn

discipline and a capacity for hard work. They set aside personal goals to achieve a mission, and they take pride in the accomplishments of their units. Many soldiers who leave the military transition these skills into excellent careers. Others find themselves lost upon leaving, uncertain about the outside world, and what to do next. The process of resocialization to civilian life is not a simple one.

Summary

Socialization is a lifelong process recurring as we enter new phases of life, such as adulthood or senior age. Resocialization is a process that removes the socialization we have developed over time and replaces it with newly learned rules and roles. Because it involves removing old habits that have been built up, resocialization can be a stressful and difficult process.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following is *not* an age-related transition point when Americans must be socialized to new roles?

- a. Infancy
- b. School age
- c. Adulthood
- d. Senior citizen

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following is true regarding American socialization of recent high school graduates?

- a. They are expected to take a year “off” before college.
- b. They are required to serve in the military for one year.
- c. They are expected to enter college, trade school, or the workforce shortly after graduation.
- d. They are required to move away from their parents.

Solution:**Answer**

C

Short Answer**Exercise:****Problem:**

Consider a person who is joining a sorority or fraternity, or attending college or boarding school, or even a child beginning kindergarten. How is the process the student goes through a form of socialization? What new cultural behaviors must the student adapt to?

Exercise:**Problem:**

Do you think resocialization requires a total institution? Why or why not? Can you think of any other ways someone could be resocialized?

Further Research

Homelessness is an endemic problem among veterans. Many soldiers leave the military or return from war and have difficulty resocializing into civilian life. Learn more about this problem at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Veteran-Homelessness> or <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/NCHV>

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Glossary

anticipatory socialization

when we prepare for future life roles

degradation ceremony

the process by which new members of a total institution lose aspects of their old identity and are given new ones

resocialization

the process by which old behaviors are removed and new behaviors are learned in their place

Introduction to Society and Social Interaction

class="introduction"

Sociologists study how societies interact with the environment and how they use technology. This Maasai village in Tanzania looks very different from a rural American town. (Photo courtesy of Guillaume Baviere/Wikimedia Commons)



Early in the morning, a group of male warriors creeps out of the village and heads for the savannah. They must be careful not to wake the other members of the tribe, lest they be accosted by the women or elders. Once they have regrouped on the plains, the warriors begin preparing for the hunt. The eldest members of the group choose the most qualified hunters, known as *ilmeluaya*, meaning men who are not afraid of death. Warriors who are not selected are sent home in shame.

Once the select group has been chosen, the warriors begin the hunt. They scour the plains for footprints or droppings, and search for dense bushes or tall termite mounds that might conceal their resting prey. The search can take ten minutes to ten hours, but once a lion is found, the warriors quickly move into place.

Selected hunters ring bells and rattle the brush, forcing the lion away from its protected hiding spot. The goal is to face the beast one-on-one on the open savannah. There will be no tricks or cheating, simply warrior against warrior. If all goes as planned, the lion will be brought down with a single spear.

When the warriors return to the village with their trophy, it is the beginning of a weeklong celebration. Although the hunt must be planned in secret, news of the warriors' success spreads quickly, and all village members come to congratulate the victors. The warrior who wounded the lion first is honored and given a nickname based on his accomplishment. Songs are sung about the warrior, and from now on he will be remembered and acknowledged throughout the community, even among other tribes.

To the Maasai, lion hunting is about more than food and security. It is a way to strengthen the bonds of community and the hierarchy among the hunters. Disputes over power are settled before the hunt, and roles are reinforced at the end, with the bravest warrior receiving the lion's tail as a trophy (Maasai Association 2011). Although Maasai society is very different from contemporary America, both share the human need to cooperate and live together in order to survive.

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Types of Societies

- Describe the difference between pre-industrial, industrial, and postindustrial societies
- Understand the role of environment on preindustrial societies
- Understand how technology impacts societal development



Maasai men are hunting with shepherd's staves and spears. How does technology influence a society's daily occupations? (Photo courtesy of Abir Anwar/flickr)

Maasai villagers, Tehranians, Americans—each is a society. But what does this mean? Exactly what is a society? In sociological terms, **society** refers to a group of people who live in a definable community and share the same culture. On a broader scale, society consists of the people and institutions around us, our shared beliefs, and our cultural ideas. Typically, more advanced societies also share a political authority.

Sociologist Gerhard Lenski (1924–) defined societies in terms of their technological sophistication. As a society advances, so does its use of technology. Societies with rudimentary technology depend on the fluctuations of their environment, while industrialized societies have more control over the impact of their surroundings and thus develop different

cultural features. This distinction is so important that sociologists generally classify societies along a spectrum of their level of industrialization, from preindustrial to industrial to postindustrial.

Preindustrial Societies

Before the Industrial Revolution and the widespread use of machines, societies were small, rural, and dependent largely on local resources. Economic production was limited to the amount of labor a human being could provide, and there were few specialized occupations. The very first occupation was that of hunter-gatherer.

Hunter-Gatherer

Hunter-gatherer societies demonstrate the strongest dependence on the environment of the various types of preindustrial societies. As the basic structure of human society until about 10,000–12,000 years ago, these groups were based around kinship or tribes. Hunter-gatherers relied on their surroundings for survival—they hunted wild animals and foraged for uncultivated plants for food. When resources became scarce, the group moved to a new area to find sustenance, meaning they were nomadic. These societies were common until several hundred years ago, but today only a few hundred remain in existence, such as indigenous Australian tribes sometimes referred to as “aborigines,” or the Bambuti, a group of pygmy hunter-gatherers residing in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Hunter-gatherer groups are quickly disappearing as the world’s population explodes.

Pastoral

Changing conditions and adaptations led some societies to rely on the domestication of animals where circumstances permitted. Roughly 7,500 years ago, human societies began to recognize their ability to tame and breed animals and to grow and cultivate their own plants. **Pastoral societies**

rely on the domestication of animals as a resource for survival. Unlike earlier hunter-gatherers who depended entirely on existing resources to stay alive, pastoral groups were able to breed livestock for food, clothing, and transportation, creating a surplus of goods. Herding, or pastoral, societies remained nomadic because they were forced to follow their animals to fresh feeding grounds. Around the time that pastoral societies emerged, specialized occupations began to develop, and societies commenced trading with local groups.

Note:

The Bedouin

Throughout Northern Africa and the Arabian Peninsula live the Bedouin, modern-day nomads. While many different tribes of Bedouin exist, they all share similarities. Members migrate from one area to another, usually in conjunction with the seasons, settling near oases in the hot summer months. They tend to herds of goats, camels, and sheep, and they harvest dates in the fall (Kjeilen).

In recent years, there has been increased conflict between the Bedouin society and more modernized societies. National borders are harder to cross now than in the past, making the traditional nomadic lifestyle of the Bedouin difficult. The clash of traditions among Bedouin and other residents has led to discrimination and abuse. Bedouin communities frequently have high poverty and unemployment rates, and their members have little formal education (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2005).

The future of the Bedouin is uncertain. Government restrictions on farming and residence are slowly forcing them to integrate into modern society. Although their ancestors have traversed the deserts for thousands of years, the days of the nomadic Bedouin may be at an end.



This photo shows a Bedouin family from eastern Oman.

How will their society respond to the constraints modern society places on a nomadic lifestyle? (Photo courtesy of Tanenhaus/Wikimedia Commons)

Horticultural

Around the same time that pastoral societies were on the rise, another type of society developed, based on the newly developed capacity for people to grow and cultivate plants. Previously, the depletion of a region's crops or water supply forced pastoral societies to relocate in search of food sources for their livestock. **Horticultural societies** formed in areas where rainfall and other conditions allowed them to grow stable crops. They were similar to hunter-gatherers in that they largely depended on the environment for survival, but since they didn't have to abandon their location to follow resources, they were able to start permanent settlements. This created more stability and more material goods and became the basis for the first revolution in human survival.

Agricultural

While pastoral and horticultural societies used small, temporary tools such as digging sticks or hoes, **agricultural societies** relied on permanent tools for survival. Around 3000 B.C.E., an explosion of new technology known as the Agricultural Revolution made farming possible—and profitable. Farmers learned to rotate the types of crops grown on their fields and to reuse waste products such as fertilizer, leading to better harvests and bigger surpluses of food. New tools for digging and harvesting were made of metal, making them more effective and longer lasting. Human settlements grew into towns and cities, and particularly bountiful regions became centers of trade and commerce.

This is also the age in which people had the time and comfort to engage in more contemplative and thoughtful activities, such as music, poetry, and philosophy. This period became referred to as the “dawn of civilization” by some because of the development of leisure and humanities. Craftspeople were able to support themselves through the production of creative, decorative, or thought-provoking aesthetic objects and writings.

As resources became more plentiful, social classes became more divisive. Those who had more resources could afford better living and developed into a class of nobility. Difference in social standing between men and women increased. As cities expanded, ownership and preservation of resources became a pressing concern.

Feudal

The ninth century gave rise to **feudal societies**. These societies contained a strict hierarchical system of power based around land ownership and protection. The nobility, known as lords, placed vassals in charge of pieces of land. In return for the resources that the land provided, vassals promised to fight for their lords.

These individual pieces of land, known as fiefdoms, were cultivated by the lower class. In return for maintaining the land, peasants were guaranteed a

place to live and protection from outside enemies. Power was handed down through family lines, with peasant families serving lords for generations and generations. Ultimately, the social and economic system of feudalism would fail, replaced by capitalism and the technological advances of the industrial era.

Industrial Society

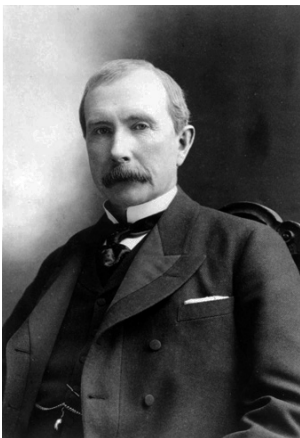
In the 18th century, Europe experienced a dramatic rise in technological invention, ushering in an era known as the Industrial Revolution. What made this period remarkable was the number of new inventions that influenced people's daily lives. Within a generation, tasks that had until this point required months of labor became achievable in a matter of days. Before the Industrial Revolution, work was largely person- or animal-based, relying on human workers or horses to power mills and drive pumps. In 1782, James Watt and Matthew Boulton created a steam engine that could do the work of 12 horses by itself.

Steam power began appearing everywhere. Instead of paying artisans to painstakingly spin wool and weave it into cloth, people turned to textile mills that produced fabric quickly at a better price, and often with better quality. Rather than planting and harvesting fields by hand, farmers were able to purchase mechanical seeders and threshing machines that caused agricultural productivity to soar. Products such as paper and glass became available to the average person, and the quality and accessibility of education and health care soared. Gas lights allowed increased visibility in the dark, and towns and cities developed a nightlife.

One of the results of increased productivity and technology was the rise of urban centers. Workers flocked to factories for jobs, and the populations of cities became increasingly diverse. The new generation became less preoccupied with maintaining family land and traditions, and more focused on acquiring wealth and achieving upward mobility for themselves and their family. People wanted their children and their children's children to continue to rise to the top, and as capitalism increased, so did social mobility.

It was during the 18th and 19th centuries of the Industrial Revolution that sociology was born. Life was changing quickly and the long-established traditions of the agricultural eras did not apply to life in the larger cities. Masses of people were moving to new environments and often found themselves faced with horrendous conditions of filth, overcrowding, and poverty. Social scientists emerged to study the relationship between the individual members of society and society as a whole.

It was during this time that power moved from the hands of the aristocracy and “old money” to business-savvy newcomers who amassed fortunes in their lifetimes. Families such as the Rockefellers and the Vanderbilts became the new power players, using their influence in business to control aspects of government as well. Eventually, concerns over the exploitation of workers led to the formation of labor unions and laws that set mandatory conditions for employees. Although the introduction of new technology at the end of the 19th century ended the industrial age, much of our social structure and social ideas—like family, childhood, and time standardization—have a basis in industrial society.



John D.
Rockefeller,
cofounder of
the Standard
Oil
Company,

came from an unremarkable family of salesmen and menial laborers. By his death at age 98, he was worth \$1.4 billion. In industrial societies, business owners such as Rockefeller hold the majority of the power. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Postindustrial Society

Information societies, sometimes known as postindustrial or digital societies, are a recent development. Unlike industrial societies that are rooted in the production of material goods, information societies are based on the production of information and services.

Digital technology is the steam engine of information societies, and computer moguls such as Steve Jobs and Bill Gates are its John D. Rockefellers and Cornelius Vanderbilts. Since the economy of information societies is driven by knowledge and not material goods, power lies with

those in charge of storing and distributing information. Members of a postindustrial society are likely to be employed as sellers of services—software programmers or business consultants, for example—instead of producers of goods. Social classes are divided by access to education, since without technical skills, people in an information society lack the means for success.

Summary

Societies are classified according to their development and use of technology. For most of human history, people lived in preindustrial societies characterized by limited technology and low production of goods. After the Industrial Revolution, many societies based their economies around mechanized labor, leading to greater profits and a trend toward greater social mobility. At the turn of the new millennium, a new type of society emerged. This postindustrial, or information, society is built on digital technology and non-material goods.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following fictional societies is an example of a pastoral society?

- a. The Deswan people, who live in small tribes and base their economy on the production and trade of textiles
- b. The Rositian Clan, a small community of farmers who have lived on their family's land for centuries
- c. The Hunti, a wandering group of nomads who specialize in breeding and training horses
- d. The Amaganda, an extended family of warriors who serve a single noble family

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following occupations is a person of power most likely to have in an information society?

- a. Software engineer
- b. Coal miner
- c. Children's book author
- d. Sharecropper

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following societies were the first to have permanent residents?

- a. Industrial
- b. Hunter-gatherer
- c. Horticultural
- d. Feudal

Solution:

Answer

C

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

In which type or types of societies do the benefits seem to outweigh the costs? Explain your answer, citing social and economic reasons.

Exercise:

Problem:

Is Gerhard Lenski right in classifying societies based on technological advances? What other criteria might be appropriate, based on what you have read?

Further Research

The Maasai are a modern pastoral society with an economy largely structured around herds of cattle. Read more about the Maasai people and see pictures of their daily lives here: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/The-Maasai>

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Glossary

agricultural societies

societies that rely on farming as a way of life

feudal societies

societies that operate on a strict hierarchical system of power based around land ownership and protection

horticultural societies

societies based around the cultivation of plants

hunter-gatherer societies

societies that depend on hunting wild animals and gathering uncultivated plants for survival

industrial societies

societies characterized by a reliance on mechanized labor to create material goods

information societies

societies based on the production of nonmaterial goods and services

pastoral societies

societies based around the domestication of animals

Theoretical Perspectives on Society

- Describe Durkhiem's functionalist view of society
- Understand the conflict theorist view of society
- Explain Marx's concepts of class and alienation
- Identify how symbolic interactionists understand society



Warren Buffett's ideas about taxation and spending habits of the very wealthy are controversial, particularly since they raise questions about America's embedded system of class structure and social power. The three major sociological paradigms differ

in their
perspectives on
these issues.
(Photo courtesy
of Medill
DC/flickr)

While many sociologists have contributed to research on society and social interaction, three thinkers form the base of modern-day perspectives. Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber developed different theoretical approaches to help us understand the way societies function.

Émile Durkheim and Functionalism

As a functionalist, Émile Durkheim's (1858–1917) perspective on society stressed the necessary interconnectivity of all of its elements. To Durkheim, society was greater than the sum of its parts. He asserted that individual behavior was not the same as collective behavior, and that studying collective behavior was quite different from studying an individual's actions. Durkheim called the communal beliefs, morals, and attitudes of a society the **collective conscience**. In his quest to understand what causes individuals to act in similar and predictable ways, he wrote, "If I do not submit to the conventions of society, if in my dress I do not conform to the customs observed in my country and in my class, the ridicule I provoke, the social isolation in which I am kept, produce, although in an attenuated form, the same effects as punishment" (Durkheim 1895). Durkheim also believed that **social integration**, or the strength of ties that people have to their social groups, was a key factor in social life.

Following the ideas of Comte and Spencer, Durkheim likened society to that of a living organism, in which each organ plays a necessary role in keeping the being alive. Even the socially deviant members of society are necessary, Durkheim argued, as punishments for deviance affirm established cultural values and norms. That is, punishment of a crime reaffirms our moral consciousness. "A crime is a crime because we

condemn it,” Durkheim wrote in 1893. “An act offends the common consciousness not because it is criminal, but it is criminal because it offends that consciousness” (Durkheim 1893). Durkheim called these elements of society “social facts.” By this, he meant that social forces were to be considered real and existed outside the individual.

As an observer of his social world, Durkheim was not entirely satisfied with the direction of society in his day. His primary concern was that the cultural glue that held society together was failing, and that people were becoming more divided. In his book *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), Durkheim argued that as society grew more complex, social order made the transition from mechanical to organic.

Pre-industrial societies, Durkheim explained, were held together by **mechanical solidarity**, a type of social order maintained by the collective consciousness of a culture. Societies with mechanical solidarity act in a mechanical fashion; things are done mostly because they have always been done that way. This type of thinking was common in preindustrial societies where strong bonds of kinship and a low division of labor created shared morals and values among people, such as hunter-gatherer groups. When people tend to do the same type of work, Durkheim argued, they tend to think and act alike.

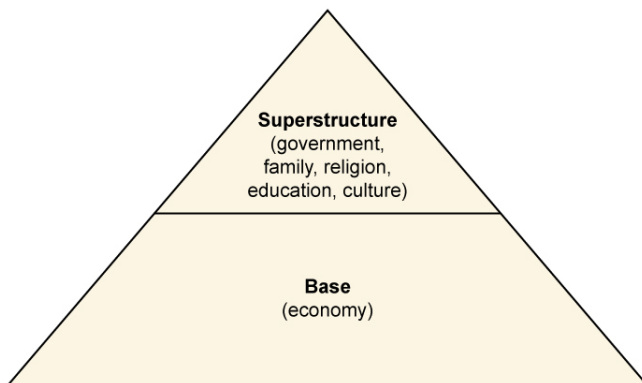
In industrial societies, mechanical solidarity is replaced with **organic solidarity**, social order based around an acceptance of economic and social differences. In capitalist societies, Durkheim wrote, division of labor becomes so specialized that everyone is doing different things. Instead of punishing members of a society for failure to assimilate to common values, organic solidarity allows people with differing values to coexist. Laws exist as formalized morals and are based on restitution rather than revenge.

While the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity is, in the long run, advantageous for a society, Durkheim noted that it can be a time of chaos and “normlessness.” One of the outcomes of the transition is something he called social **anomie**. Anomie—literally, “without law”—is a situation in which society no longer has the support of a firm collective consciousness. Collective norms are weakened. People, while more interdependent to accomplish complex tasks, are also alienated from each

other. Anomie is experienced in times of social uncertainty, such as war, or a great upturn or downturn in the economy. As societies reach an advanced stage of organic solidarity, they avoid anomie by redeveloping a set of shared norms. According to Durkheim, once a society achieves organic solidarity, it has finished its development.

Karl Marx and Conflict Theory

Karl Marx (1818–1883) is certainly among the most significant social thinkers in recent history. While there are many critics of his work, it is still widely respected and influential. For Marx, society's constructions were predicated upon the idea of “base and superstructure.” This term refers to the idea that a society's economic character forms its base, upon which rests the culture and social institutions, the superstructure. For Marx, it is the base (economy) that determines what a society will be like.



Karl Marx asserted that all elements of a society's structure depend on its economic structure.

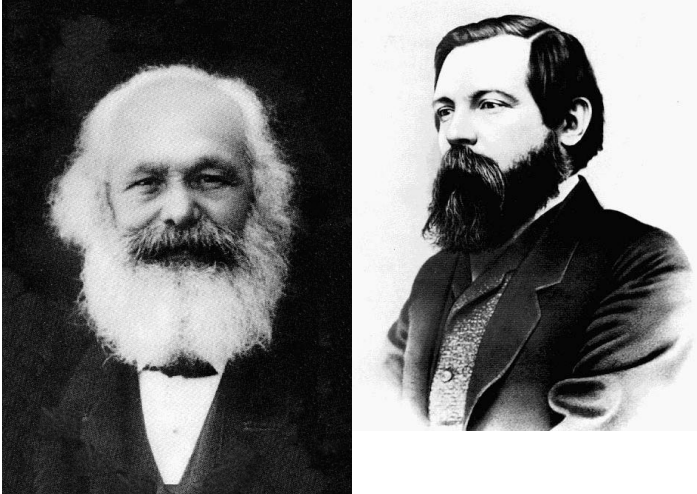
Additionally, Marx saw conflict in society as the primary means of change. Economically, he saw conflict existing between the owners of the means of production—the **bourgeoisie**—and the laborers, called the **proletariat**.

Marx maintained that these conflicts appeared consistently throughout history during times of social revolution. These revolutions or “class antagonisms” as he called them, were a result of one class dominating another. Most recently, with the end of feudalism, a new revolutionary class he called the bourgeoisie dominated the proletariat laborers. The bourgeoisie were revolutionary in the sense that they represented a radical change in the structure of society. In Marx’s words, “Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other—Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” (Marx and Engels 1848).

In the mid-19th century, as industrialization was booming, labor became more and more exploitative of the working class. The large manufacturers of steel were particularly ruthless, and their facilities became popularly dubbed “satanic mills” based on a poem by William Blake. Marx’s colleague and friend, Frederick Engels, wrote *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* in 1844, which described in detail the horrid conditions.

"Such is the Old Town of Manchester, and on re-reading my description, I am forced to admit that instead of being exaggerated, it is far from black enough to convey a true impression of the filth, ruin, and uninhabitableness, the defiance of all considerations of cleanliness, ventilation, and health which characterise the construction of this single district, containing at least twenty to thirty thousand inhabitants. And such a district exists in the heart of the second city of England, the first manufacturing city of the world."

Add to that the long hours, the use of child labor, and exposure to extreme conditions of heat, cold, and toxic chemicals, and it is no wonder that Marx and Engels referred to capitalism as the “dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.”



Karl Marx (left) and Friedrich Engels (right) analyzed differences in social power between “have” and “have-not” groups. (Photo (a) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of George Lester/Wikimedia Commons)

For Marx, what we do defines who we are. In historical terms, in spite of the persistent nature of one class dominating another, some element of humanity existed. There was at least some connection between the worker and the product, augmented by the natural conditions of seasons and the rise and fall of the sun, such as we see in an agricultural society. But with the bourgeoisie revolution and the rise of industry and capitalism, the worker now worked for wages alone. His relationship to his efforts was no longer of a human nature, but based on artificial conditions.

Marx described modern society in terms of alienation. **Alienation** refers to the condition in which the individual is isolated and divorced from his or her society, work, or the sense of self. Marx defined four specific types of alienation.

Alienation from the product of one's labor. An industrial worker does not have the opportunity to relate to the product he is laboring on. Instead of training for years as a watchmaker, an unskilled worker can get a job at a watch factory pressing buttons to seal pieces together. The worker does not care if he is making watches or cars, simply that the job exists. In the same way, a worker may not even know or care what product he is contributing to. A worker on a Ford assembly line may spend all day installing windows on car doors without ever seeing the rest of the car. A cannery worker can spend a lifetime cleaning fish without ever knowing what product they are used for.

Alienation from the process of one's labor. A worker does not control the conditions of her job because she does not own the means of production. If a person is hired to work in a fast food restaurant, she is expected to make the food the way she is taught. All ingredients must be combined in a particular order and in a particular quantity; there is no room for creativity or change. An employee at Burger King cannot decide to change the spices used on the fries in the same way that an employee on a Ford assembly line cannot decide to place a car's headlights in a different position. Everything is decided by the bourgeoisie who then dictate orders to the laborers.

Alienation from others. Workers compete, rather than cooperate. Employees vie for time slots, bonuses, and job security. Even when a worker clocks out at night and goes home, the competition does not end. As Marx commented in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), "No sooner is the exploitation of the laborer by the manufacturer, so far at an end, that he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portion of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker."

Alienation from one's self. A final outcome of industrialization is a loss of connectivity between a worker and her occupation. Because there is nothing that ties a worker to her labor, there is no longer a sense of self. Instead of being able to take pride in an identity such as being a watchmaker, automobile builder, or chef, a person is simply a cog in the machine.

Taken as a whole, then, alienation in modern society means that an individual has no control over his life. Even in feudal societies, a person controlled the manner of his labor as to when and how it was carried out.

But why, then, does the modern working class not rise up and rebel? (Indeed, Marx predicted that this would be the ultimate outcome and collapse of capitalism.)

Another idea that Marx developed is the concept of **false consciousness**. False consciousness is a condition in which the beliefs, ideals, or ideology of a person are not in the person's own best interest. In fact, it is the ideology of the dominant class (here, the bourgeoisie capitalists) that is imposed upon the proletariat. Ideas such as the emphasis of competition over cooperation, or of hard work being its own reward, clearly benefit the owners of industry. Therefore, workers are less likely to question their place in society and assume individual responsibility for existing conditions.

In order for society to overcome false consciousness, Marx proposed that it be replaced with **class consciousness**, the awareness of one's rank in society. Instead of existing as a "class in itself," the proletariat must become a "class for itself" in order to produce social change (Marx and Engels 1848), meaning that instead of just being an inert strata of society, the class could become an advocate for social improvements. Only once society entered this state of political consciousness would it be ready for a social revolution.



An assembly line worker installs car parts with the aid of complex machinery. Has technology made this type of labor more or less

alienating? (Photo courtesy
of Carol
Highsmith/Wikimedia
Commons)

Max Weber and Symbolic Interactionism

While Karl Marx may be one of the best-known thinkers of the 19th century, Max Weber is certainly one of the greatest influences in the field of sociology. Like the other social thinkers discussed here, he was concerned with the important changes taking place in Western society with the advent of industrialization. And, like Marx and Durkheim, he feared that industrialization would have negative effects on individuals.

Weber's primary focus on the structure of society lay in the elements of class, status, and power. Similar to Marx, Weber saw class as economically determined. Society, he believed, was split between owners and laborers. Status, on the other hand, was based on noneconomic factors such as education, kinship, and religion. Both status and class determined an individual's power, or influence over ideas. Unlike Marx, Weber believed that these ideas formed the base of society.

Weber's analysis of modern society centered on the concept of **rationalization**. A rational society is one built around logic and efficiency rather than morality or tradition. To Weber, capitalism is entirely rational. Although this leads to efficiency and merit-based success, it can have negative effects when taken to the extreme. In some modern societies, this is seen when rigid routines and strict design lead to a mechanized work environment and a focus on producing identical products in every location.

Another example of the extreme conditions of rationality can be found in Charlie Chaplin's classic film *Modern Times* (1936). Chaplin's character performs a routine task to the point where he cannot stop his motions even while away from the job. Indeed, today we even have a recognized medical

condition that results from such tasks, known as “repetitive stress syndrome.”

Weber was also unlike his predecessors in that he was more interested in how individuals experienced societal divisions than in the divisions themselves. The symbolic interactionism theory, the third of the three most recognized theories of sociology, is based on Weber’s early ideas that emphasize the viewpoint of the individual and how that individual relates to society. For Weber, the culmination of industrialization, rationalization, and the like results in what he referred to as the **iron cage**, in which the individual is trapped by institutions and bureaucracy. This leads to a sense of “disenchantment of the world,” a phrase Weber used to describe the final condition of humanity. Indeed a dark prediction, but one that has, at least to some degree, been borne out (Gerth and Mills 1918). In a rationalized, modern society, we have supermarkets instead of family-owned stores. We have chain restaurants instead of local eateries. Superstores that offer a multitude of merchandise have replaced independent businesses that focused on one product line, such as hardware, groceries, automotive repair, or clothing. Shopping malls offer retail stores, restaurants, fitness centers, even condominiums. This change may be rational, but is it universally desirable?



Cubicles are used to maximize individual workspace in an office. Such

structures may be rational,
but they are also isolating.

(Photo courtesy of Tim
Patterson/flickr)

Note:

The Protestant Work Ethic

In a series of essays in 1904, Weber presented the idea of the *Protestant work ethic*, a new attitude toward work based on the Calvinist principle of predestination. In the 16th century, Europe was shaken by the Protestant Revolution. Religious leaders such as Martin Luther and John Calvin argued against the Catholic Church's belief in salvation through obedience. While Catholic leaders emphasized the importance of religious dogma and performing good deeds as a gateway to heaven, Protestants believed that inner grace, or faith in God, was enough to achieve salvation.

John Calvin in particular popularized the Christian concept of predestination, the idea that all events—including salvation—have already been decided by God. Because followers were never sure whether they had been chosen to enter Heaven or Hell, they looked for signs in their everyday lives. If a person was hard-working and successful, he was likely to be one of the chosen. If a person was lazy or simply indifferent, he was likely to be one of the damned.

Weber argued that this mentality encouraged people to work hard for personal gain; after all, why should one help the unfortunate if they were already damned? Over time, the Protestant work ethic spread and became the foundation for capitalism.

Summary

Émile Durkheim believed that as societies advance, they make the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity. For Karl Marx, society exists in

terms of class conflict. With the rise of capitalism, workers become alienated from themselves and others in society. Sociologist Max Weber noted that the rationalization of society can be taken to unhealthy extremes.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Organic solidarity is most likely to exist in which of the following types of societies?

- a. Hunter-gatherer
- b. Industrial
- c. Agricultural
- d. Feudal

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

According to Marx, the _____ own the means of production in a society.

- a. proletariat
- b. vassals
- c. bourgeoisie
- d. anomie

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following best depicts Marx's concept of alienation from the process of one's labor?

- a. A supermarket cashier always scans store coupons before company coupons because she was taught to do it that way.
- b. A businessman feels that he deserves a raise, but is nervous to ask his manager for one; instead, he comforts himself with the idea that hard work is its own reward.
- c. An associate professor is afraid that she won't be given tenure and starts spreading rumors about one of her associates to make herself look better.
- d. A construction worker is laid off and takes a job at a fast food restaurant temporarily, although he has never had an interest in preparing food before.

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

The Protestant work ethic is based on the concept of predestination, which states that _____.

- a. performing good deeds in life is the only way to secure a spot in Heaven
- b. salvation is only achievable through obedience to God
- c. no person can be saved before he or she accepts Jesus Christ as his or her savior

d. God has already chosen those who will be saved and those who will be damned

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

The concept of the iron cage was popularized by which of the following sociological thinkers?

- a. Max Weber
 - b. Karl Marx
 - c. Émile Durkheim
 - d. Friedrich Engels
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Émile Durkheim's ideas about society can best be described as _____.

- a. functionalist
 - b. conflict theorist
 - c. symbolic interactionist
 - d. rationalist
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Choose two of the three sociologists discussed here (Durkheim, Marx, Weber) and use their arguments to explain a current social event such as the Occupy movement. Do their theories hold up under modern scrutiny?

Exercise:

Problem:

Think of the ways workers are alienated from the product and process of their jobs. How can these concepts be applied to students and their educations?

Further Research

One of the most influential pieces of writing in modern history was Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *The Communist Manifesto*. Visit this site to read the original document that spurred revolutions around the world: <http://openstaxcollege.org/1/Communist-Party>.

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Glossary

alienation

an individual's isolation from his society, his work, and his sense of self

anomie

a situation in which society no longer has the support of a firm collective consciousness

bourgeoisie

the owners of the means of production in a society

class consciousness

awareness of one's rank in society

collective conscience

the communal beliefs, morals, and attitudes of a society

false consciousness

a person's beliefs and ideology are in conflict with her best interests

iron cage

a situation in which an individual is trapped by social institutions

mechanical solidarity

a type of social order maintained by the collective consciousness of a culture

organic solidarity

a type of social order based around an acceptance of economic and social differences

proletariat

the laborers in a society

rationalization

a belief that modern society should be built around logic and efficiency rather than morality or tradition

social integration

how strongly a person is connected to his or her social group

Social Constructions of Reality

- Understand the sociological concept of reality as a social construct
- Define roles and describe their place in people's daily interactions
- Explain how individuals present themselves and perceive themselves in a social context



Who are we? What role do we play in society? According to sociologists, we construct reality through our interactions with others. In a way, our day-to-day interactions are like those of actors on a stage.

(Photo courtesy of Jan Lewandowski/flickr)

Until now, we've primarily discussed the differences between societies. Rather than discuss their problems and configurations, we'll now explore how society came to be and how sociologists view social interaction.

In 1966 sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann wrote a book called *The Social Construction of Reality*. In it, they argued that society is created by humans and human interaction, which they call **habitualization**. Habitualization describes how "any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be ... performed again in the

future in the same manner and with the same economical effort” (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Not only do we construct our own society, but we accept it as it is because others have created it before us. Society is, in fact, “habit.”

For example, your school exists as a school and not just as a building because you and others agree that it is a school. If your school is older than you are, it was created by the agreement of others before you. In a sense, it exists by consensus, both prior and current. This is an example of the process of **institutionalization**, the act of implanting a convention or norm into society. Bear in mind that the institution, while socially constructed, is still quite real.

Another way of looking at this concept is through W.I. Thomas’s notable **Thomas theorem** which states, “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas 1928). That is, people’s behavior can be determined by their subjective construction of reality rather than by objective reality. For example, a teenager who is repeatedly given a label—overachiever, player, bum—might live up to the term even though it initially wasn’t a part of his character.

Like Berger and Luckmann’s description of habitualization, Thomas states that our moral codes and social norms are created by “successive definitions of the situation.” This concept is defined by sociologist Robert K. Merton as a **self-fulfilling prophecy**. Merton explains that with a self-fulfilling prophecy, even a false idea can become true if it is acted upon. One example he gives is of a “bank run.” Say for some reason, a number of people falsely fear that their bank is soon to be bankrupt. Because of this false notion, people run to their bank and demand all their cash at once. As banks rarely, if ever, have that much money on hand, the bank does indeed run out of money, fulfilling the customers’ prophecy. Here, reality is constructed by an idea.

Symbolic interactionists offer another lens through which to analyze the social construction of reality. With a theoretical perspective focused on the symbols (like language, gestures, and artifacts) that people use to interact, this approach is interested in how people interpret those symbols in daily interactions. For example, we might feel fright at seeing a person holding a

gun, unless, of course, it turns out to be a police officer. Interactionists also recognize that language and body language reflect our values. One has only to learn a foreign tongue to know that not every English word can be easily translated into another language. The same is true for gestures. While Americans might recognize a “thumbs up” as meaning “great,” in Germany it would mean “one” and in Japan it would mean “five.” Thus, our construction of reality is influenced by our symbolic interactions.



The story line of a self-fulfilling prophecy appears in many literary works, perhaps most famously in the story of Oedipus. Oedipus is told by an oracle that he will murder his father and marry his mother. In going out of his way to avoid his fate, Oedipus inadvertently fulfills it. Oedipus’s story illustrates one way in which members of society contribute to the social construction of reality. (Photo courtesy of Jean-Antoine-Theodore Giroust/Wikimedia Commons)

Roles and Status

As you can imagine, people employ many types of behaviors in day-to-day life. **Roles** are patterns of behavior that we recognize in each other that are representative of a person's social status. Currently, while reading this text, you are playing the role of a student. However, you also play other roles in your life, such as "daughter," "neighbor," or "employee." These various roles are each associated with a different status.

Sociologists use the term **status** to describe the responsibilities and benefits a person experiences according to their rank and role in society. Some statuses are **ascribed**—those you do not select, such as son, elderly person, or female. Others, called **achieved statuses**, are obtained by choice, such as a high school dropout, self-made millionaire, or nurse. As a daughter or son, you occupy a different status than as a neighbor or employee. One person can be associated with a multitude of roles and statuses. Even a single status such as "student" has a complex **role-set**, or array of roles, attached to it (Merton 1957).

If too much is required of a single role, individuals can experience **role strain**. Consider the duties of a parent: cooking, cleaning, driving, problem-solving, acting as a source of moral guidance—the list goes on. Similarly, a person can experience **role conflict** when one or more roles are contradictory. A parent who also has a full-time career can experience role conflict on a daily basis. When there is a deadline at the office but a sick child needs to be picked up from school, which comes first? When you are working toward a promotion but your children want you to come to their school play, which do you choose? Being a college student can conflict with being an employee, being an athlete, or even being a friend. Our roles in life have a great effect on our decisions and who we become.

Presentation of Self

Of course, it is impossible to look inside a person's head and study what role they are playing. All we can observe is behavior, or role performance. **Role performance** is how a person expresses his or her role. Sociologist Erving Goffman presented the idea that a person is like an actor on a stage. Calling his theory dramaturgy, Goffman believed that we use "impression management" to present ourselves to others as we hope to be perceived. Each situation is a new scene, and individuals perform different roles depending on who is present (Goffman 1959). Think about the way you behave around your coworkers versus the way you behave around your grandparents versus the way you behave with a blind date. Even if you're not consciously trying to alter your personality, your grandparents, coworkers, and date probably see different sides of you.

As in a play, the setting matters as well. If you have a group of friends over to your house for dinner, you are playing the role of a host. It is agreed upon that you will provide food and seating and probably be stuck with a lot of the cleanup at the end of the night. Similarly, your friends are playing the roles of guests, and they are expected to respect your property and any rules you may set forth ("Don't leave the door open or the cat will get out."). In any scene, there needs to be a shared reality between players. In this case, if you view yourself as a guest and others view you as a host, there are likely to be problems.

Impression management is a critical component of symbolic interactionism. For example, a judge in a courtroom has many "props" to create an impression of fairness, gravity, and control—like her robe and gavel. Those entering the courtroom are expected to adhere to the scene being set. Just imagine the "impression" that can be made by how a person dresses. This is the reason that attorneys frequently select the hairstyle and apparel for witnesses and defendants in courtroom proceedings.



A courtroom exemplifies a scene where all players have clearly defined roles and expected performances. (Photo courtesy of John Marino/flicker)

Goffman's dramaturgy ideas expand on the ideas of Charles Cooley and the **looking-glass self**. According to Cooley, we base our image on what we think other people see (Cooley 1902). We imagine how we must appear to others, then react to this speculation. We don certain clothes, prepare our hair in a particular manner, wear makeup, use cologne, and the like—all with the notion that our presentation of ourselves is going to affect how others perceive us. We expect a certain reaction, and, if lucky, we get the one we desire and feel good about it. But more than that, Cooley believed that our sense of self is based upon this idea: we imagine how we look to others, draw conclusions based upon their reactions to us, and then we develop our personal sense of self. In other words, people's reactions to us are like a mirror in which we are reflected.

Summary

Society is based on the social construction of reality. How we define society influences how society actually is. Likewise, how we see other people

influences their actions as well as our actions toward them. We all take on various roles throughout our lives, and our social interactions depend on what types of roles we assume, who we assume them with, and the scene where interaction takes place.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Mary works full-time at an office downtown while her young children stay at a neighbor's house. She's just learned that the childcare provider is leaving the country. Mary has succumbed to pressure to volunteer at her church, plus her ailing mother-in-law will be moving in with her next month. Which of the following is likely to occur as Mary tries to balance her existing and new responsibilities?

- a. Role strain
- b. Self-fulfilling prophecy
- c. Status conflict
- d. Status strain

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

According to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, society is based on _____.

- a. habitual actions
- b. status
- c. institutionalization

d. role performance

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Paco knows that women find him attractive, and he's never found it hard to get a date. But as he ages, he dyes his hair to hide the gray and wears clothes that camouflage the weight he has put on. Paco's behavior can be best explained by the concept of _____.

- a. role strain
 - b. the looking-glass self
 - c. role performance
 - d. habitualization
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Draw a large circle and then "slice" the circle into pieces like a pie, labeling each piece with a role or status that you occupy. Add as many statuses, ascribed and achieved, that you have. Don't forget things like dog owner, gardener, traveler, student, runner, employee. How many statuses do you have? In which ones are there role conflicts?

Exercise:

Problem:

Think of a self-fulfilling prophecy that you've experienced. Based on this experience, do you agree with the Thomas theorem? Use examples from current events to support your answer as well.

Further Research

TV Tropes is a website where users identify concepts that are commonly used in literature, film, and other media. Although its tone is for the most part humorous, the site provides a good jumping-off point for research. Browse the list of examples under the entry of “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Pay careful attention to the real-life examples. Are there ones that surprised you or that you don't agree with? <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/tv-tropes>

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Glossary

achieved status

the status a person chooses, such as a level of education or income

ascribed status

the status outside of an individual's control, such as sex or race

habitualization

the idea that society is constructed by us and those before us, and it is followed like a habit

institutionalization

the act of implanting a convention or norm into society

looking-glass self

our reflection of how we think we appear to others

roles

patterns of behavior that are representative of a person's social status

role-set

an array of roles attached to a particular status

role conflict

when one or more of an individual's roles clash

role performance

the expression of a role

role strain

stress that occurs when too much is required of a single role

self-fulfilling prophecy

an idea that becomes true when acted upon

status

the responsibilities and benefits that a person experiences according to their rank and role in society

Thomas theorem

how a subjective reality can drive events to develop in accordance with that reality, despite being originally unsupported by objective reality

Introduction to Groups and Organizations class="introduction"

The alternative punk band NOFX is playing outside in Los Angeles. The music is loud, the crowd pumped up and excited. But neither the lyrics nor the people in the audience are quite what you might expect. Mixed in with the punks and young rebel students are members of local unions, from well-dressed teachers to more grizzled labor leaders. The lyrics are not published anywhere but are available on YouTube: “We’re here to represent/The 99 percent/Occupy, occupy, occupy.” The song: “Wouldn’t It Be Nice If Every Movement Had a Theme Song” (Cabrel 2011).

Across the country at an Occupy camp in New York, roughly three dozen members of the Facilitation Working Group, a part of the General Assembly, take a steady stream of visitors with requests at their unofficial headquarters. One person wants a grant for \$1500 to make herbal medications available to those staying at the park. Another wants to present Native American peace principles derived from the Iroquois Confederacy. Yet another has a spreadsheet that he wants used as an evaluation tool for the facilitators. Numerous groups make up this movement, yet there’s no national leader. What makes a group something more than just a collection of people? How are leadership functions and styles established in a group dynamic?

Nurses, teachers,
and Teamsters
showed up to
protest at the
Occupy
movement.
(Photo courtesy
of David
Shankbone/flickr
)



Most people have a sense of what it means to be a part of some kind of a group, whether it is a sports team, sorority, school club, or family. Groups connect us to others through commonalities of geography, interests, race, religion, and activities. But for the groups of people protesting from Augusta, Georgia, to Oakland, California, and hundreds of cities in between, their connection within the Occupy Wall Street movement is harder to define. What unites these people? Are the out-of-work doctoral candidates truly aligned with the high school dropouts? Do the urban poor genuinely feel for the campus-based protest against university tuition hikes?

Groups are prevalent in our social lives and provide a significant way we understand and define ourselves—both through groups we feel a connection to and those we don't. Groups also play an important role in society. As enduring social units, they help foster shared value systems and are key to the structure of society as we know it. There are three primary sociological

perspectives for studying groups: Functionalist, Conflict, and Interactionist. We can look at the Occupy movement through the lenses of these methods to better understand the roles and challenges that groups offer.

The Functionalist perspective is a big-picture macro-level view that looks at how different aspects of society are intertwined. This perspective is based on the idea that society is a well-balanced system with all parts necessary to the whole, and it studies the roles these parts play in relation to the whole. In the case of the Occupy Movement, a Functionalist might look at what macro-level needs the movement serves. For example, a Structural Functionalist might ask how the Occupy Wall Street movement forces both haves and have-nots to pay attention to the economy, or the way urbanites are impacted by the influx of protestors who typically reside outside of their region.

The Conflict perspective is another macroanalytical view, one that focuses on the genesis and growth of inequality. A conflict theorist studying the Occupy movement might look at how business interests have manipulated the system over the last 30 years, leading to the gross inequality we see today. Or this perspective might explore how the massive redistribution of wealth from the middle class to the upper class could lead to a two-class system reminiscent of Marxist ideas.

A third perspective is the Symbolic Interaction or Interactionist perspective. This method of analyzing groups takes a micro-level view. Instead of studying the big picture, these researchers look at the day-to-day interactions of groups. Studying these details, the Interactionist looks at issues like leadership style and group dynamics. In the case of the Occupy Movement, Interactionists might ask, “How does the group dynamic in New York differ from that in Atlanta?” Or, “What dictates who becomes the *de facto* leader in different cities—geography, social dynamics, economic circumstances?”

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Types of Groups

- Understand primary and secondary groups as the two sociological groups
- Recognize in-groups and out-groups as subtypes of primary and secondary groups
- Define reference groups

Most of us feel comfortable using the word “group” without giving it much thought. In everyday use, it can be a generic term, although it carries important clinical and scientific meanings. Moreover, the concept of a group is central to much of how we think about society and human interaction. Often, we might mean different things by using that word. We might say that a group of kids all saw the dog, and it could mean 250 students in a lecture hall or four siblings playing on a front lawn. In everyday conversation, there isn’t a clear distinguishing use. So how can we hone the meaning more precisely for sociological purposes?

Defining a Group

The term **group** is an amorphous one and can refer to a wide variety of gatherings, from just two people (think about a “group project” in school when you partner with another student), a club, a regular gathering of friends, or people who work together or share a hobby. In short, the term refers to any collection of at least two people who interact with some frequency and who share a sense that their identity is somehow aligned with the group. Of course, every time people are gathered it is not necessarily a group. A rally is usually a one-time event, for instance, and belonging to a political party doesn’t imply interaction with others. People who exist in the same place at the same time, but who do not interact or share a sense of identity—such as a bunch of people standing in line at Starbucks—are considered an **aggregate**, or a crowd. Another example of a non-group is people who share similar characteristics but are not tied to one another in any way. These people would be considered a **category**, and an example would be that all children born from approximately 1980–2000 are referred to as “Millennial.” Why are Millennials a category and not a group?

Because while some of them may share a sense of identity, they do not, as a whole, interact frequently with each other.

Interestingly, people within an aggregate or category can become a group. During disasters, people in a neighborhood (an aggregate) who did not know each other might become friendly and depend on each other at the local shelter. After the disaster ends and the people go back to simply living near each other, the feeling of cohesiveness may last since they have all shared an experience. They might remain a group, practicing emergency readiness, coordinating supplies for next time, or taking turns caring for neighbors who need extra help. Similarly, there may be many groups within a single category. Consider teachers, for example. Within this category, groups may exist like teachers' unions, teachers who coach, or staff members who are involved with the PTA.

Types of Groups

Sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929) suggested that groups can broadly be divided into two categories: **primary groups** and **secondary groups** (Cooley 1909). According to Cooley, primary groups play the most critical role in our lives. The primary group is usually fairly small and is made up of individuals who generally engage face-to-face in long-term emotional ways. This group serves emotional needs: **expressive functions** rather than pragmatic ones. The primary group is usually made up of significant others, those individuals who have the most impact on our socialization. The best example of a primary group is the family.

Secondary groups are often larger and impersonal. They may also be task-focused and time-limited. These groups serve an **instrumental function** rather than an expressive one, meaning that their role is more goal- or task-oriented than emotional. A classroom or office can be an example of a secondary group. Neither primary nor secondary groups are bound by strict definitions or set limits. In fact, people can move from one group to another. A graduate seminar, for example, can start as a secondary group focused on the class at hand, but as the students work together throughout their program, they may find common interests and strong ties that transform them into a primary group.

Note:**Best Friends She's Never Met**

Writer Allison Levy worked alone. While she liked the freedom and flexibility of working from home, she sometimes missed having a community of coworkers, both for the practical purpose of brainstorming and the more social “water cooler” aspect. Levy did what many do in the internet age: she found a group of other writers online through a web forum. Over time, a group of approximately 20 writers, who all wrote for a similar audience, broke off from the larger forum and started a private invitation-only forum. While writers in general represent all genders, ages, and interests, it ended up being a collection of 20- and 30-something women who comprised the new forum; they all wrote fiction for children and young adults.

At first, the writers’ forum was clearly a secondary group united by the members’ professions and work situations. As Levy explained, “On the internet, you can be present or absent as often as you want. No one is expecting you to show up.” It was a useful place to research information about different publishers and about who had recently sold what, and to track industry trends. But as time passed, Levy found it served a different purpose. Since the group shared other characteristics beyond their writing (such as age and gender), the online conversation naturally turned to matters such as child-rearing, aging parents, health, and exercise. Levy found it was a sympathetic place to talk about any number of subjects, not just writing. Further, when people didn’t post for several days, others expressed concern, asking whether anyone had heard from the missing writers. It reached a point where most members would tell the group if they were traveling or needed to be offline for awhile.

The group continued to share. One member on the site who was going through a difficult family illness wrote, “I don’t know where I’d be without you women. It is so great to have a place to vent that I know isn’t hurting anyone.” Others shared similar sentiments.

So is this a primary group? Most of these people have never met each other. They live in Hawaii, Australia, Minnesota, and across the world. They may never meet. Levy wrote recently to the group, saying, “Most of my ‘real-life’ friends and even my husband don’t really get the writing thing. I don’t know what I’d do without you.” Despite the distance and the lack of physical contact, the group clearly fills an expressive need.



Engineering and construction students gather around a job site. How do your academic interests define your in and out-groups? (Photo courtesy of USACEpublicaffairs/flickr)

In-Groups and Out-Groups

One of the ways that groups can be powerful is through inclusion, and its inverse, exclusion. In-groups and out-groups are subcategories of primary and secondary groups that help identify this dynamic. Primary groups consist of both in-groups and out-groups, as do secondary groups. The feeling that one belongs in an elite or select group is a heady one, while the feeling of not being allowed in, or of being in competition with a group, can be motivating in a different way. Sociologist William Sumner (1840–1910) developed the concepts of **in-group** and **out-group** to explain this phenomenon (Sumner 1906). In short, an in-group is the group that an individual feels she belongs to, and she believes it to be an integral part of who she is. An out-group, conversely, is a group someone doesn't belong to; often there may be a feeling of disdain or competition in relation to an out-group. Sports teams, unions, and sororities are examples of in-groups and out-groups; people may belong to, or be an outsider to, any of these.

While these affiliations can be neutral or even positive, such as the case of a team sport competition, the concept of in-groups and out-groups can also explain some negative human behavior, such as white supremacist movements like the Ku Klux Klan, or the bullying of gay or lesbian students. By defining others as “not like us” and inferior, in-groups can end up practicing ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, ageism, and heterosexism—manners of judging others negatively based on their culture, race, sex, age, or sexuality. Often, in-groups can form within a secondary group. For instance, a workplace can have cliques of people, from senior executives who play golf together, to engineers who write code together, to young singles who socialize after hours. While these in-groups might show favoritism and affinity for other in-group members, the overall organization may be unable or unwilling to acknowledge it. Therefore, it pays to be wary of the politics of in-groups, since members may exclude others as a form of gaining status within the group.

Note:

Bullying and Cyberbullying: How Technology Has Changed the Game

Most of us know that the old rhyme “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” is inaccurate. Words can hurt, and never is that more apparent than in instances of bullying. Bullying has always existed, often reaching extreme levels of cruelty in children and young adults. People at these stages of life are especially vulnerable to others’ opinions of them, and they’re deeply invested in their peer groups. Today, technology has ushered in a new era of this dynamic. Cyberbullying is the use of interactive media by one person to torment another, and it is on the rise. Cyberbullying can mean sending threatening texts, harassing someone in a public forum (such as Facebook), hacking someone’s account and pretending to be him or her, posting embarrassing images online, and so on. A study by the Cyberbullying Research Center found that 20 percent of middle school students admitted to “seriously thinking about committing suicide” as a result of online bullying (Hinduja and Patchin 2010). Whereas bullying face-to-face requires willingness to interact with your victim, cyberbullying allows bullies to harass others from the privacy of their homes without witnessing the damage firsthand. This form of

bullying is particularly dangerous because it's widely accessible and therefore easier to accomplish.

Cyberbullying, and bullying in general, made international headlines in 2010 when a 15-year-old girl, Phoebe Prince, in South Hadley, Massachusetts, committed suicide after being relentlessly bullied by girls at her school. In the aftermath of her death, the bullies were prosecuted in the legal system and the state passed anti-bullying legislation. This marked a significant change in how bullying, including cyberbullying, is viewed in the United States. Now there are numerous resources for schools, families, and communities to provide education and prevention on this issue. The White House hosted a Bullying Prevention summit in March 2011, and President and First Lady Obama have used Facebook and other social media sites to discuss the importance of the issue.

Will it change the behavior of would-be cyberbullies? That remains to be seen. But hopefully communities can work to protect victims before they feel they must resort to extreme measures.

Reference Groups



Athletes are often viewed as a reference group for young people.
(Photo courtesy of Johnny Bivera/U.S. Navy/Wikimedia Commons)

A **reference group** is a group that people compare themselves to—it provides a standard of measurement. In American society, peer groups are common reference groups. Kids and adults pay attention to what their peers wear, what music they like, what they do with their free time—and they compare themselves to what they see. Most people have more than one reference group, so a middle school boy might not just look at his classmates but also at his older brother’s friends and see a different set of norms. And he might observe the antics of his favorite athletes for yet another set of behaviors.

Some other examples of reference groups can be an individual’s church, synagogue, or mosque; one’s cultural center; workplace; family gathering; and even one’s parents. Often, reference groups convey competing messages. For instance, on television and in movies, young adults often have wonderful apartments, cars, and lively social lives despite not holding a job. In music videos, young women might dance and sing in a sexually aggressive way that suggests experience beyond their years. At all ages, we use reference groups to help guide our behavior and show us social norms. So how important is it to surround yourself with positive reference groups? You may never meet or know a reference group, but it still impacts and influences how you act. Identifying reference groups can help you understand the source of the social identities you aspire to or want to distance yourself from.

Note:

College: A World of In-Groups, Out-Groups, and Reference Groups



Which fraternity or sorority would you fit into, if any?
Sorority recruitment day offers students an opportunity to learn about these different groups.
(Photo courtesy of Murray State/flickr)

For a student entering college, the sociological study of groups takes on an immediate and practical meaning. After all, when we arrive someplace new, most of us glance around to see how well we fit in or stand out in the ways we want. This is a natural response to a reference group, and on a large campus, there can be many competing groups. Say you are a strong athlete who wants to play intramural sports, but your favorite musicians are a local punk band. You may find yourself engaged with two very different reference groups.

These reference groups can also become your in-groups or out-groups. For instance, different groups on campus might solicit you to join. Are there fraternities and sororities at your school? If so, chances are they will try to convince students—that is, students they deem worthy—to join them. And if you love playing soccer and want to play on a campus team, but you're wearing shredded jeans, combat boots, and a local band T-shirt, you might have a hard time convincing the soccer team to give you a chance. While most campus groups refrain from insulting competing groups, there is a definite sense of an in-group versus an out-group. "Them?" a member might say. "They're all right, but their parties are nowhere near as cool as

ours.” Or, “Only serious engineering geeks join that group.” This immediate categorization into in-groups and out-groups means that students must choose carefully, since whatever group they associate with won’t just define their friends—it may also define their enemies.

Summary

Groups largely define how we think of ourselves. There are two main types of groups: primary and secondary. As the names suggest, the primary group is the long-term, complex one. People use groups as standards of comparison to define themselves—both who they are and who they are not. Sometimes groups can be used to exclude people or as a tool that strengthens prejudice.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

What does a Functionalist consider when studying a phenomenon like the Occupy Wall Street movement?

- a. The minute functions that every person at the protests plays in the whole
- b. The internal conflicts that play out within such a diverse and leaderless group
- c. How the movement contributes to the stability of society by offering the discontented a safe, controlled outlet for dissension
- d. The factions and divisions that form within the movement

Exercise:

Problem:

What is the largest difference between the Functionalist and Conflict perspectives and the Interactionist perspective?

- a. The former two consider long-term repercussions of the group or situation, while the latter focuses on the present.
- b. The first two are the more common sociological perspective, while the latter is a newer sociological model.
- c. The first two focus on hierarchical roles within an organization, while the last takes a more holistic view.
- d. The first two perspectives address large-scale issues facing groups, while the last examines more detailed aspects.

Exercise:

Problem: What role do secondary groups play in society?

- a. They are transactional, task-based, and short-term, filling practical needs.
- b. They provide a social network that allows people to compare themselves to others.
- c. The members give and receive emotional support.
- d. They allow individuals to challenge their beliefs and prejudices.

Exercise:

Problem:

When a high school student gets teased by her basketball team for receiving an academic award, she is dealing with competing

_____.

- a. primary groups
- b. out-groups
- c. reference groups
- d. secondary groups

Exercise:

Problem: Which of the following is NOT an example of an in-group?

- a. The Ku Klux Klan
- b. A fraternity
- c. A synagogue
- d. A high school

Exercise:

Problem:

What is a group whose values, norms, and beliefs come to serve as a standard for one's own behavior?

- a. Secondary group
- b. Formal organization
- c. Reference group
- d. Primary group

Exercise:

Problem:

A parent who is worrying over her teenager's dangerous and self-destructive behavior and low self-esteem may wish to look at her child's:

- a. reference group
- b. in-group
- c. out-group
- d. All of the above

Solution:

Answers

(1:C, 2:D, 3:A, 4:C, 5:D, 6:C, 7:D)

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

How has technology changed your primary groups and secondary groups? Do you have more (and separate) primary groups due to online connectivity? Do you believe that someone, like Levy, can have a true primary group made up of people she has never met? Why or why not?

Exercise:

Problem:

Compare and contrast two different political groups or organizations, such as the Occupy and Tea Party movements, or one of the Arab Spring uprisings. How do the groups differ in terms of leadership, membership, and activities? How do the group's goals influence participants? Are any of them in-groups (and have they created out-groups)? Explain your answer.

Exercise:

Problem:

The concept of hate crimes has been linked to in-groups and out-groups. Can you think of an example where people have been excluded or tormented due to this kind of group dynamic?

Further Research

For more information about cyberbullying causes and statistics, check out this website: <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Cyberbullying>

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Glossary

aggregate

a collection of people who exist in the same place at the same time, but who don't interact or share a sense of identity

category

people who share similar characteristics but who are not connected in any way

expressive function

a group function that serves an emotional need

group

any collection of at least two people who interact with some frequency and who share some sense of aligned identity

in-group

a group a person belongs to and feels is an integral part of his identity

instrumental function

being oriented toward a task or goal

out-group

a group that an individual is not a member of, and may even compete with

primary groups

small, informal groups of people who are closest to us

reference groups

groups to which an individual compares herself

secondary groups

larger and more impersonal groups that are task-focused and time limited

Group Size and Structure

- How size influences group dynamics
- Different styles of leadership
- How conformity is impacted by groups



Cadets illustrate how strongly conformity can define groups.

(Photo courtesy David Spender/flickr)

Dyads, Triads, and Large Groups

A small group is typically one where the collection of people is small enough that all members of the group know each other and share simultaneous interaction, such as a nuclear family, a dyad, or a triad. Georg Simmel (1858–1915) wrote extensively about the difference between a **dyad**, or two-member group, and a **triad**, which is a three-member group (Simmel 1902). In the former, if one person withdraws, the group can no longer exist. One can think of a divorce, which effectively ends the “group” of the married couple, or of two best friends never speaking again. In a triad, however, the dynamic is quite different. If one person withdraws, the group lives on. A triad has a different set of relationships. If there are three in the group, two-against-one dynamics can develop and there exists the potential for a majority opinion on any issue. Small groups generally have strong internal cohesiveness and a sense of connection. The challenge,

however, is for small groups to achieve large goals. They can struggle to be heard or to be a force for change if they are pushing against larger groups. In short, they are easier to ignore.

It is difficult to define exactly when a small group becomes a large group. One step might be when there are too many people to join in a simultaneous discussion. Another might be when a group joins with other groups as part of a movement that unites them. These larger groups may share a geographic space, such as a fraternity or sorority on the same campus, or they might be spread out around the globe. The larger the group, the more attention it can garner, and the more pressure members can put toward whatever goal they wish to achieve. At the same time, the larger the group becomes, the more the risk grows for division and lack of cohesion.

Group Leadership

Often, larger groups require some kind of leadership. In small, primary groups, leadership tends to be informal. After all, most families don't take a vote on who will rule the group, nor do most groups of friends. This is not to say that *de facto* leaders don't emerge, but formal leadership is rare. In secondary groups, leadership is usually more overt. There are often clearly outlined roles and responsibilities, with a chain of command to follow. Some secondary groups, like the army, have highly structured and clearly understood chains of command, and many lives depend on those. After all, how well could soldiers function in a battle if they had no idea whom to listen to or if different people were calling out orders? Other secondary groups, like a workplace or a classroom, also have formal leaders, but the styles and functions of leadership can vary significantly.

Leadership function refers to the main focus or goal of the leader. An **instrumental leader** is one who is goal-oriented and largely concerned with accomplishing set tasks. One can imagine that an army general or a Fortune 500 CEO would be an instrumental leader. In contrast, **expressive leaders** are more concerned with promoting emotional strength and health, and ensuring that people feel supported. Social and religious leaders—rabbis, priests, imams, directors of youth homes and social service programs—are often perceived as expressive leaders. There is a

longstanding stereotype that men are more instrumental leaders and women are more expressive leaders. And although gender roles have changed, even today many women and men who exhibit the opposite-gender manner can be seen as deviants and can encounter resistance. Secretary of State and former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton provides an example of how society reacts to a high-profile woman who is an instrumental leader. Despite the stereotype, Boatwright and Forrest (2000) have found that both men and women prefer leaders who use a combination of expressive and instrumental leadership.

In addition to these leadership functions, there are three different **leadership styles**. **Democratic leaders** encourage group participation in all decision making. These leaders work hard to build consensus before choosing a course of action and moving forward. This type of leader is particularly common, for example, in a club where the members vote on which activities or projects to pursue. These leaders can be well liked, but there is often a challenge that the work will proceed slowly since consensus building is time-consuming. A further risk is that group members might pick sides and entrench themselves into opposing factions rather than reaching a solution. In contrast, a **laissez-faire leader** (French for “leave it alone”) is hands-off, allowing group members to self-manage and make their own decisions. An example of this kind of leader might be an art teacher who opens the art cupboard, leaves materials on the shelves, and tells students to help themselves and make some art. While this style can work well with highly motivated and mature participants who have clear goals and guidelines, it risks group dissolution and a lack of progress. As the name suggests, **authoritarian leaders** issue orders and assigns tasks. These leaders are clear instrumental leaders with a strong focus on meeting goals. Often, entrepreneurs fall into this mold, like Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. Not surprisingly, this type of leader risks alienating the workers. There are times, however, when this style of leadership can be required. In different circumstances, each of these leadership styles can be effective and successful. Consider what leadership style you prefer. Why? Do you like the same style in different areas of your life, such as a classroom, a workplace, and a sports team?

Note:

Women Leaders and the Hillary Clinton/Sarah Palin Phenomenon



Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton drew fire for her leadership style. (Photo courtesy marc/flickr)

The 2008 presidential election marked a dynamic change when two female politicians entered the race. Of the 200 people who have run for president during the country's history, fewer than 30 have been women. Democratic presidential candidate and former First Lady Hillary Clinton was both famously polarizing and popular. She had almost as many passionate supporters as she did people who reviled her.

On the other side of the aisle was Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin. The former governor of Alaska, Palin was, to some, the perfect example of the modern woman. She juggled her political career with raising a growing family, and relied heavily on the use of social media to spread her message.

So what light did these candidates' campaigns shed on the possibilities of a female presidency? According to some political analysts, women candidates face a paradox: They must be as tough as their male opponents on issues such as foreign policy or risk appearing weak. However, the stereotypical expectation of women as expressive leaders is still prevalent. Consider that Hillary Clinton's popularity surged in her 2008 campaign after she cried on the campaign trail. It was enough for the *New York Times* to publish an editorial, "Can Hillary Cry Her Way Back to the White

House?” (Dowd 2008). Harsh, but her approval ratings soared afterwards. In fact, many compared it to how politically likable she was in the aftermath of President Clinton’s Monica Lewinsky scandal. Sarah Palin’s expressive qualities were promoted to a greater degree. While she has benefited from the efforts of feminists before her, she self-identified as a traditional woman with traditional values, a point she illustrated by frequently bringing her young children up on stage with her. So what does this mean for women who would be president, and for those who would vote for them? On the positive side, a recent study of 18- to 25-year-old women that asked whether female candidates in the 2008 election made them believe a woman would be president during their lifetime found that the majority thought they would (Weeks 2011). And the more that young women demand female candidates, the more commonplace female contenders will become. Women as presidential candidates may no longer be a novelty with the focus of their campaign, no matter how obliquely, on their gender. Some, however, remain skeptical. As one political analyst said bluntly, “women don’t succeed in politics—or other professions—unless they act like men. The standard for running for national office remains distinctly male” (Weeks 2011).



This gag gift demonstrates how female leaders may be

viewed if they
violate social
norms. (Photo
courtesy of
istolethetv/flickr
)

Conformity

We all like to fit in to some degree. Likewise, when we want to stand out, we want to choose how we stand out and for what reasons. For example, a woman who loves cutting-edge fashion and wants to dress in thought-provoking new styles likely wants to be noticed, but most likely she will want to be noticed within a framework of high fashion. She wouldn't want people to think she was too poor to find proper clothes. **Conformity** is the extent to which an individual complies with group norms or expectations. As you might recall, we use reference groups to assess and understand how to act, to dress, and to behave. Not surprisingly, young people are particularly aware of who conforms and who does not. A high school boy whose mother makes him wear ironed button-down shirts might protest that he will look stupid—that everyone else wears T-shirts. Another high school boy might like wearing those shirts as a way of standing out. How much do you enjoy being noticed? Do you consciously prefer to conform to group norms so as not to be singled out? Are there people in your class who immediately come to mind when you think about those who don't want to conform?

Psychologist Solomon Asch (1907–1996) conducted experiments that illustrated how great the pressure to conform is, specifically within a small group (1956). After reading the feature, ask yourself what you would do in Asch's experiment. Would you speak up? What would help you speak up and what would discourage it?

Note:**Conforming to Expectations**

In 1951, psychologist Solomon Asch sat a small group of about eight people around a table. Only one of the people sitting there was the true subject; the rest were associates of the experimenter. However, the subject was led to believe that the others were all, like him, people brought in for an experiment in visual judgments. The group was shown two cards, the first card with a single vertical line, and the second card with three vertical lines differing in length. The experimenter polled the group, asking each participant one at a time which line on the second card matched up with the line on the first card.

However, this was not really a test of visual judgment. Rather, it was Asch's study on the pressures of conformity. He was curious to see what the effect of multiple wrong answers would be on the subject, who presumably was able to tell which lines matched. In order to test this, Asch had each planted respondent answer in a specific way. The subject was seated in such a way that he had to hear almost everyone else's answers before it was his turn. Sometimes the non-subject members would unanimously choose an answer that was clearly wrong.

So what was the conclusion? Asch found that 37 out of 50 test subjects responded with an "obviously erroneous" answer at least once. When faced by a unanimous wrong answer from the rest of the group, the subject conformed to a mean of four of the staged answers. Asch revised the study and repeated it, wherein the subject still heard the staged wrong answers, but was allowed to write down his answer rather than speak it aloud. In this version, the number of examples of conformity—giving an incorrect answer so as not to contradict the group—fell by two thirds. He also found that group size had an impact on how much pressure the subject felt to conform.

The results showed that speaking up when only one other person gave an erroneous answer was far more common than when five or six people defended the incorrect position. Finally, Asch discovered that people were far more likely to give the correct answer in the face of near-unanimous consent if they had a single ally. If even one person in the group also dissented, the subject conformed only a quarter as often. Clearly, it was easier to be a minority of two than a minority of one.

Asch concluded that there are two main causes for conformity: people want to be liked by the group or they believe the group is better informed than they are. He found his study results disturbing. To him, they revealed that intelligent, well-educated people would, with very little coaxing, go along with an untruth. He believed this result highlighted real problems with the education system and values in our society (Asch 1956).

Summary

The size and dynamic of a group greatly affects how members act. Primary groups rarely have formal leaders, although there can be informal leadership. Groups generally are considered large when there are too many members for a simultaneous discussion. In secondary groups there are two types of leadership functions, with expressive leaders focused on emotional health and wellness, and instrumental leaders more focused on results. Further, there are different leadership styles: democratic leaders, authoritarian leaders, and laissez-faire leaders.

Within a group, conformity is the extent to which people want to go along with the norm. A number of experiments have illustrated how strong the drive to conform can be. It is worth considering real-life examples of how conformity and obedience can lead people to ethically and morally suspect acts.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Two people who have just had a baby have turned from a _____ to a _____.

- a. primary group; secondary group
- b. dyad; triad
- c. couple; family

d. de facto group; nuclear family

Exercise:

Problem: Who is more likely to be an expressive leader?

- a. The sales manager of a fast-growing cosmetics company
- b. A high school teacher at a reform school
- c. The director of a summer camp for chronically ill children
- d. A manager at a fast-food restaurant

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following is NOT an appropriate group for democratic leadership?

- a. A fire station
- b. A college classroom
- c. A high school prom committee
- d. A homeless shelter

Exercise:

Problem:

In Asch's study on conformity, what contributed to the ability of subjects to resist conforming?

- a. A very small group of witnesses
- b. The presence of an ally
- c. The ability to keep one's answer private
- d. All of the above

Exercise:

Problem:

Which type of group leadership has a communication pattern that flows from the top down?

- a. Authoritarian
- b. Democratic
- c. Laissez-faire
- d. Expressive

Solution:**Answers**

(1:B, 2:C, 3:A, 4:D, 5:A)

Short Answer**Exercise:****Problem:**

Think of a scenario where an authoritarian leadership style would be beneficial. Explain. What are the reasons it would work well? What are the risks?

Exercise:**Problem:**

Describe a time you were led by a leader using, in your opinion, a leadership style that didn't suit the situation. When and where was it? What could she or he have done better?

Exercise:

Problem:

Imagine you are in Asch's study. Would you find it difficult to give the correct answer in that scenario? Why or why not? How would you change the study now to improve it?

Exercise:**Problem:**

What kind of leader do you tend to be? Do you embrace different leadership styles and functions as the situation changes? Give an example of a time you were in a position of leadership and what function and style you expressed.

Further Research

What is your leadership style? The website <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Leadership> offers a quiz to help you find out!

Explore other experiments on conformity at <http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Stanford-Prison>

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Glossary

authoritarian leader

a leader who issues orders and assigns tasks

conformity

the extent to which an individual complies with group or societal norms

democratic leader

a leader who encourages group participation and consensus-building before moving into action

dyad

a two-member group

expressive leader

a leader who is concerned with process and with ensuring everyone's emotional wellbeing

generalizability

the amount that information from a specific example can be generalized to apply to the overall population

instrumental leader

a leader who is goal oriented with a primary focus on accomplishing tasks

laissez-faire leader

a hands-off leader who allows members of the group to make their own decisions

leadership function

the main focus or goal of a leader

leadership style

the style a leader uses to achieve goals or elicit action from group members

triad

a three-member group

Formal Organizations

- Understand the different types of formal organizations
- Recognize the characteristics of bureaucracies
- Identify the concepts of the McJob and the McDonaldization of society

A complaint of modern life is that society is dominated by large and impersonal secondary organizations. From schools to businesses to healthcare to government, these organizations, referred to as **formal organizations**, are highly bureaucratized. Indeed, all formal organizations are, or likely will become, **bureaucracies**. A bureaucracy is an ideal type of formal organization. Ideal doesn't mean "best" in its sociological usage; it refers to a general model that describes a collection of characteristics, or a type that could describe most examples of the item under discussion. For example, if your professor were to tell the class to picture a car in their minds, most students will picture a car that shares a set of characteristics: four wheels, a windshield, and so on. Everyone's car will be somewhat different, however. Some might picture a two-door sports car while others picture an SUV. The general idea of the car that everyone shares is the ideal type. We will discuss bureaucracies as an ideal type of organization.

Types of Formal Organizations



Girl Scout troops and correctional facilities are both formal organizations. (Photo (a) courtesy of moonlightbulb/flickr;

Photo (b) courtesy of CxOxS/flickr)

Sociologist Amitai Etzioni (1975) posited that formal organizations fall into three categories. **Normative organizations**, also called **voluntary organizations**, are based on shared interests. As the name suggests, joining them is voluntary and typically done because people find membership rewarding in an intangible way. The Audubon Society or a ski club are examples of normative organizations. **Coercive organizations** are groups that one must be coerced, or pushed, to join. These may include prison or a rehabilitation center. Goffman states that most coercive organizations are **total institutions** (1961). A total institution refers to one in which inmates live a controlled lifestyle and in which total resocialization takes place. The third type is **utilitarian organizations**, which, as the name suggests, are joined because of the need for a specific material reward. High school or a workplace would fall into this category—one joined in pursuit of a diploma, the other in order to make money.

	Normative or Voluntary	Coercive	Utilitarian
Benefit of Membership	Intangible benefit	Corrective benefit	Tangible benefit
Type of Membership	Volunteer basis	Required	Contractual basis
Feeling of Connectedness	Shared affinity	No affinity	Some affinity

Table of Formal Organizations This table shows Etzioni's three types of formal organizations. (Table courtesy of Etzioni 1975)

Bureaucracies

Bureaucracies are an ideal type of formal organization. Pioneer sociologist Max Weber popularly characterized a bureaucracy as having a hierarchy of authority, a clear division of labor, explicit rules, and impersonality (1922). People often complain about bureaucracies—declaring them slow, rule-bound, difficult to navigate, and unfriendly. Let's take a look at terms that define a bureaucracy to understand what they mean.

Hierarchy of authority refers to the aspect of bureaucracy that places one individual or office in charge of another, who in turn must answer to her own superiors. For example, as an employee at Walmart, your shift manager assigns you tasks. Your shift manager answers to his store manager, who must answer to her regional manager, and so on in a chain of command, up to the CEO who must answer to the board members, who in turn answer to the stockholders. Everyone in this bureaucracy follows the chain of command.

A **clear division of labor** refers to the fact that within a bureaucracy, each individual has a specialized task to perform. For example, psychology professors teach psychology, but they do not attempt to provide students with financial aid forms. In this case, it is a clear and commonsense division. But what about in a restaurant where food is backed up in the kitchen and a hostess is standing nearby texting on her phone? Her job is to seat customers, not to deliver food. Is this a smart division of labor?

The existence of **explicit rules** refers to the way in which rules are outlined, written down, and standardized. For example, at your college or university, the student guidelines are contained within the Student Handbook. As technology changes and campuses encounter new concerns like cyberbullying, identity theft, and other hot-button issues, organizations are scrambling to ensure their explicit rules cover these emerging topics.

Finally, bureaucracies are also characterized by **impersonality**, which takes personal feelings out of professional situations. This characteristic grew, to

some extent, out of a desire to protect organizations from nepotism, backroom deals, and other types of favoritism, simultaneously protecting customers and others served by the organization. Impersonality is an attempt by large formal organizations to protect their members. However, the result is often that personal experience is disregarded. For example, you may be late for work because your car broke down, but the manager at Pizza Hut doesn't care about why you are late, only that you are late.

Bureaucracies are, in theory at least, **meritocracies**, meaning that hiring and promotion is based on proven and documented skills, rather than on nepotism or random choice. In order to get into a prestigious college, you need to perform well on the SAT and have an impressive transcript. In order to become a lawyer and represent clients, you must graduate law school and pass the state bar exam. Of course, there are many well-documented examples of success by those who did not proceed through traditional meritocracies. Think about technology companies with founders who dropped out of college, or performers who became famous after a YouTube video went viral. How well do you think established meritocracies identify talent? Wealthy families hire tutors, interview coaches, test-prep services, and consultants to help their kids get into the best schools. This starts as early as kindergarten in New York City, where competition for the most highly-regarded schools is especially fierce. Are these schools, many of which have copious scholarship funds that are intended to make the school more democratic, really offering all applicants a fair shake?

There are several positive aspects of bureaucracies. They are intended to improve efficiency, ensure equal opportunities, and increase efficiency. And there are times when rigid hierarchies are needed. But remember that many of our bureaucracies grew large at the same time that our school model was developed—during the Industrial Revolution. Young workers were trained and organizations were built for mass production, assembly line work, and factory jobs. In these scenarios, a clear chain of command was critical. Now, in the information age, this kind of rigid training and adherence to protocol can actually decrease both productivity and efficiency.

Today's workplace requires a faster pace, more problem-solving, and a flexible approach to work. Too much adherence to explicit rules and a

division of labor can leave an organization behind. And unfortunately, once established, bureaucracies can take on a life of their own. Maybe you have heard the expression “trying to turn a tanker around mid-ocean,” which refers to the difficulties of changing direction with something large and set in its ways. State governments and current budget crises are examples of this challenge. It is almost impossible to make quick changes, leading states to continue, year after year, with increasingly unbalanced budgets. Finally, bureaucracies, as mentioned, grew as institutions at a time when privileged white males held all the power. While ostensibly based on meritocracy, bureaucracies can perpetuate the existing balance of power by only recognizing the merit in traditionally male and privileged paths.

Michels (1911) suggested that all large organizations are characterized by the **Iron Rule of Oligarchy**, wherein an entire organization is ruled by a few elites. Do you think this is true? Can a large organization be collaborative?



This McDonald's storefront in Egypt shows the McDonaldization of society. (Photo courtesy of s_w_ellis/flickr)

The McDonaldization of Society

The **McDonaldization of Society** (Ritzer 1993) refers to the increasing presence of the fast food business model in common social institutions. This business model includes efficiency (the division of labor), predictability, calculability, and control (monitoring). For example, in your average chain grocery store, people at the register check out customers while stockers keep the shelves full of goods and deli workers slice meats and cheese to order (efficiency). Whenever you enter a store within that grocery chain, you receive the same type of goods, see the same store organization, and find the same brands at the same prices (predictability). You will find that goods are sold by the pound, so that you can weigh your fruit and vegetable purchase rather than simply guessing at the price for that bag of onions, while the employees use a timecard to calculate their hours and receive overtime pay (calculability). Finally, you will notice that all store employees are wearing a uniform (and usually a name tag) so that they can be easily identified. There are security cameras to monitor the store, and some parts of the store, such as the stockroom, are generally considered off-limits to customers (control). While McDonaldization has resulted in improved profits and an increased availability of various goods and services to more people worldwide, it has also reduced the variety of goods available in the marketplace while rendering available products uniform, generic, and bland. Think of the difference between a mass-produced shoe and one made by a local cobbler, between a chicken from a family-owned farm versus a corporate grower, or a cup of coffee from the local diner instead of one from Starbucks.

Note:

Secrets of the McJob

We often talk about bureaucracies disparagingly, and no organization takes more heat than fast food restaurants. The book and movie *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* by Eric Schossler paints an ugly picture of what goes in, what goes on, and what comes out of fast food chains. From their environmental impact to their role in the US obesity epidemic, fast food chains are connected to numerous societal ills. Furthermore, working at a fast food restaurant is often disparaged, and even referred to dismissively, as a McJob rather than a real job.

But business school professor Jerry Newman went undercover and worked behind the counter at seven fast food restaurants to discover what really goes on there. His book, *My Secret Life on the McJob* documents his experience. Newman found, unlike Schossler, that these restaurants have much good alongside the bad. Specifically, he asserted that the employees were honest and hardworking, the management was often impressive, and that the jobs required a lot more skill and effort than most people imagined. In the book, Newman cites a pharmaceutical executive who states that a fast-food service job on an applicant's résumé is a plus because it indicates the employee is reliable and can handle pressure.

So what do you think? Are these McJobs and the organizations that offer them still serving a role in the economy and people's careers? Or are they dead-end jobs that typify all that is negative about large bureaucracies? Have you ever worked in one? Would you?

Jobs in Fast Food Will Enjoy Stronger than Average Growth in Coming Years



Fast-food jobs are expected to grow more quickly than most industries.
(Graph courtesy of U.S. LBS)

Summary

Large organizations fall into three main categories: normative/voluntary, coercive, and utilitarian. We live in a time of contradiction: while the pace of change and technology are requiring people to be more nimble and less bureaucratic in their thinking, large bureaucracies like hospitals, schools, and governments are more hampered than ever by their organizational format. At the same time, the past few decades have seen the development of a trend to bureaucratize and conventionalize local institutions. Increasingly, Main Streets across the country resemble each other; instead of a Bob's Coffee Shop and Jane's Hair Salon there is a Dunkin Donuts and a Supercuts. This trend has been referred to as the McDonaldization of society.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: Which is NOT an example of a normative organization?

- a. A book club
- b. A church youth group
- c. A People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) protest group
- d. A study hall

Exercise:

Problem: Which of these is an example of a total institution?

- a. Jail
- b. High school
- c. Political party
- d. A gym

Exercise:

Problem: Why do people join utilitarian organizations?

- a. Because they feel an affinity with others there
- b. Because they receive a tangible benefit from joining
- c. Because they have no choice
- d. Because they feel pressured to do so

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of bureaucracies?

- a. Coercion to join
- b. Hierarchy of authority
- c. Explicit rules
- d. Division of labor

Exercise:

Problem:

What are some of the intended positive aspects of bureaucracies?

- a. Increased productivity
- b. Increased efficiency
- c. Equal treatment for all
- d. All of the above

Exercise:

Problem: What is an advantage of the McDonaldization of society?

- a. There is more variety of goods.
- b. There is less theft.
- c. There is more worldwide availability of goods.

d. There is more opportunity for businesses.

Exercise:

Problem: What is a disadvantage of the McDonaldization of society?

- a. There is less variety of goods.
- b. There is an increased need for employees with postgraduate degrees.
- c. There is less competition so prices are higher.
- d. There are fewer jobs so unemployment increases.

Solution:

Answers

(1:D, 2:A, 3:B, 4:A, 5:D, 6:C, 7:A)

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

What do you think about the recent spotlight on fast food restaurants? Do you think they contribute to society's ills? Do you believe they provide a needed service? Have you ever worked a job like this? What did you learn?

Exercise:

Problem:

Do you consider today's large companies like General Motors, Amazon, or Facebook to be bureaucracies? Why or why not? Which of the main characteristics of bureaucracies do you see in them? Which are absent?

Exercise:

Problem:

Where do you prefer to shop, eat out, or grab a cup of coffee? Large chains like Walmart or smaller retailers? Starbucks or a local restaurant? What do you base your decisions on? Does this section change how you think about these choices? Why or why not?

Further Research

As mentioned above, the concept of McDonaldization is a growing one. The following link discusses this phenomenon further:

<http://openstaxcollege.org/l/McDonaldization>

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Glossary

bureaucracies

are formal organizations characterized by a hierarchy of authority, a clear division of labor, explicit rules, and impersonality.

clear division of labor

refers to the fact that each individual in a bureaucracy has a specialized task to perform

coercive organizations

are organizations that people do not voluntarily join, such as prison or a mental hospital

explicit rules

the types of rules in a bureaucracy; rules that are outlined, recorded, and standardized

formal organizations

large, impersonal organizations

hierarchy of authority

a clear chain of command found in a bureaucracy

impersonality

the removal of personal feelings from a professional situation

Iron Rule of Oligarchy

the theory that an organization is ruled by a few elites rather than through collaboration

McDonaldization

the increasing presence of the fast food business model in common social institutions

meritocracy

a bureaucracy where membership and advancement is based on merit —proven and documented skills

normative or voluntary organizations

organizations that people join to pursue shared interests or because they provide some intangible rewards

total institution

an organization in which participants live a controlled lifestyle and in which total resocialization occurs

utilitarian organizations

organizations that are joined to fill a specific material need

Introduction to Deviance, Crime, and Social Control class="introduction"

Police are one resource that societies use to combat behavior considered deviant to the point of criminality.

(Photo courtesy of David.Monniaux/Wikimedia Commons)



Philip Hudson entered Morehouse College at age 19 wearing men's jeans and long hair tied back in dreadlocks. "The first day I got to campus, I was a boy," Philip recalled a few years later. He said he was "trying to be this masculine boy, real cool and real quiet." By the end of his sophomore year, Philip had swapped his jeans for skirts and found himself the target of a strong backlash (King 2010). Morehouse College made national news for

its response to the teen's lifestyle, establishing a schoolwide ban on the wearing of women's clothing by men (Chen 2010).

Morehouse College, an all-male college in Atlanta, Georgia, has a prestigious history. Established in 1867 as a place of higher learning for former slaves, Morehouse is the alma mater of great leaders such as "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Howard Thurman, and celebrities such as Samuel L. Jackson and Spike Lee" (Mungin 2009). The sense of revolution is what brought Philip to Morehouse, a place where he hoped he could be himself.

After a difficult upbringing where his gendered-ness resulted in abuse and rape, he realized that he identified as a female and wanted to express that aspect of his person. He began taking female hormones to start his biological transition to the female sex. Although Philip initially halted his treatment once he began college, he soon found others like himself. At Morehouse, he met Diamond Poulin, a student who defined himself as a man who felt comfortable in women's clothes. Joined by a handful of others, Philip and Diamond donned skirts, high heels, and other traditionally female attire on campus in an attempt to be themselves. They were jeered at and ridiculed—even attacked.

Then came the school's shocking decision in late 2009. The new rules, titled the "Appropriate Attire Policy," banned cross-dressing anywhere on the campus grounds. Those who broke the rules were not allowed to attend class unless they changed their clothing, and multiple transgressions led to disciplinary action and suspension.

Diamond left Morehouse that fall, but returned once in the spring to visit his friends. He found himself escorted off campus by school security for violating the dress code. Philip remained at Morehouse for another year before leaving because of stress. He now plans to resume his studies at a larger university in Florida. What he's most looking forward to is walking around in public without being verbally attacked. "They'll stare," Philip says with resignation, "but I'm used to that" (King 2010).

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Deviance and Control

- Define deviance and explain the nature of deviant behavior
- Differentiate between methods of social control



Much of the appeal of watching entertainers perform in drag comes from the humor inherent in seeing everyday norms violated. (Photo courtesy of Cassiopeiya/Wikimedia Commons)

What, exactly, is deviance? And what is the relationship between deviance and crime? As Philip Hudson found out, some behaviors, such as wearing clothes of the opposite sex, can be deviant in certain places, criminal in some places, and perfectly acceptable elsewhere. According to sociologist William Graham Sumner, **deviance** is a violation of established contextual, cultural, or social norms, whether folkways, mores, or codified law (1906). It can be as minor as picking one's nose in public or as major as committing murder. Although the word "deviance" has a negative connotation in everyday language, sociologists recognize that deviance is not necessarily bad (Schoepflin 2011). In fact, from a structural functionalist perspective, one of the positive contributions of deviance is that it fosters social change. For example, during the U.S. civil rights movement, Rosa Parks violated social norms when she refused to move to the "black section" of the bus,

and the Little Rock Nine broke customs of segregation to attend an Arkansas public school.

“What is deviant behavior?” cannot be answered in a straightforward manner. Whether an act is labeled deviant or not depends on many factors, including location, audience, and the individual committing the act (Becker 1963). Listening to your iPod on the way to class is considered acceptable behavior. Listening to your iPod during your 2 o’clock sociology lecture is considered rude. Listening to your iPod when on the witness stand before a judge may cause you to be held in contempt of court, and consequently fined or jailed.

As norms vary across culture and time, it makes sense that notions of deviance change also. Fifty years ago, public schools in the United States had strict dress codes that, among other stipulations, often banned women from wearing pants to class. Today, it’s socially acceptable for women to wear pants, but less so for men to wear skirts. In a time of war, acts usually considered morally reprehensible, such as taking the life of another, may actually be rewarded. Whether an act is deviant or not depends on society’s response to that act.

Note:

Why I Drive a Hearse

When sociologist Todd Schoepflin ran into his childhood friend Bill, he was shocked to see him driving a hearse. A professionally trained researcher, Schoepflin wondered what effect driving a hearse had on his friend and what effect it might have on others on the road. Would using such a vehicle for everyday errands be considered deviant by most people? Schoepflin interviewed Bill, curious first to know why he drove such an unconventional car. Bill had simply been on the lookout for a reliable winter car; on a tight budget, he searched used car ads and stumbled upon one for the hearse. The car ran well and the price was right, so he bought it. Bill admitted that others’ reactions to the car had been mixed. His parents were appalled and he received odd stares from his coworkers. A mechanic once refused to work on it, stating that it was “a dead person machine.” On the whole, however, Bill received mostly positive reactions. Strangers gave

him a thumbs-up on the highway and stopped him in parking lots to chat about his car. His girlfriend loved it, his friends wanted to take it tailgating, and people offered to buy it. Could it be that driving a hearse isn't really so deviant after all?

Schoepflin theorized that, although viewed as outside conventional norms, driving a hearse is such a mild form of deviance that it actually becomes a mark of distinction. Conformists find the choice of vehicle intriguing or appealing, while nonconformists see a fellow oddball to whom they can relate. As one of Bill's friends remarked, "Every guy wants to own a unique car like this and *you* can certainly pull it off." Such anecdotes remind us that although deviance is often viewed as a violation of norms, it's not always viewed in a negative light (Schoepflin 2011).



A hearse with the license plate "LASTRYD." How would you view the owner of this car?
(Photo courtesy of Brian Teutsch/flickr)

Social Control

When a person violates a social norm, what happens? A driver caught speeding can receive a speeding ticket. A student who wears a bathrobe to class gets a warning from a professor. An adult belching loudly is avoided.

All societies practice **social control**, the regulation and enforcement of norms. The underlying goal of social control is to maintain **social order**, an arrangement of practices and behaviors on which society's members base their daily lives. Think of social order as an employee handbook and social control as a manager. When a worker violates a workplace guideline, the manager steps in to enforce the rules.

The means of enforcing rules are known as **sanctions**. Sanctions can be positive as well as negative. **Positive sanctions** are rewards given for conforming to norms. A promotion at work is a positive sanction for working hard. **Negative sanctions** are punishments for violating norms. Being arrested is a punishment for shoplifting. Both types of sanctions play a role in social control.

Sociologists also classify sanctions as formal or informal. Although shoplifting, a form of social deviance, may be illegal, there are no laws dictating the proper way to scratch one's nose. That doesn't mean picking your nose in public won't be punished; instead, you will encounter **informal sanctions**. Informal sanctions emerge in face-to-face social interactions. For example, wearing flip-flops to an opera or swearing loudly in church may draw disapproving looks or even verbal reprimands, whereas behavior that is seen as positive—such as helping an old man carry grocery bags across the street—may receive positive informal reactions, such as a smile or pat on the back.

Formal sanctions, on the other hand, are ways to officially recognize and enforce norm violations. If a student violates her college's code of conduct, for example, she might be expelled. Someone who speaks inappropriately to the boss could be fired. Someone who commits a crime may be arrested or imprisoned. On the positive side, a soldier who saves a life may receive an official commendation.

The table below shows the relationship between different types of sanctions.

	Informal	Formal
Positive	An expression of thanks	A promotion at work
Negative	An angry comment	A parking fine

Informal/Formal Sanctions Formal and informal sanctions may be positive or negative. Informal sanctions arise in social interactions, whereas formal sanctions officially enforce norms.

Summary

Deviance is a violation of norms. Whether or not something is deviant depends on contextual definitions, the situation, and people’s response to the behavior. Society seeks to limit deviance through the use of sanctions that help maintain a system of social control.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following best describes how deviance is defined?

- a. Deviance is defined by federal, state, and local laws.
- b. Deviance’s definition is determined by one’s religion.
- c. Deviance occurs whenever someone else is harmed by an action.
- d. Deviance is socially defined.

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

During the civil rights movement, Rosa Parks and other black protestors spoke out against segregation by refusing to sit at the back of the bus. This is an example of _____.

- a. An act of social control
- b. An act of deviance
- c. A social norm
- d. Criminal mores

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

A student has a habit of talking on her cell phone during class. One day, the professor stops his lecture and asks her to respect the other students in the class by turning off her phone. In this situation, the professor used _____ to maintain social control.

- a. Informal negative sanctions
- b. Informal positive sanctions
- c. Formal negative sanctions
- d. Formal positive sanctions

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem: Societies practice social control to maintain _____.

- a. formal sanctions
- b. social order
- c. cultural deviance
- d. sanction labeling

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

One day, you decide to wear pajamas to the grocery store. While you shop, you notice people giving you strange looks and whispering to others. In this case, the grocery store patrons are demonstrating _____.

- a. deviance
- b. formal sanctions
- c. informal sanctions
- d. positive sanctions

Solution:

Answer

C

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

If given the choice, would you purchase an unusual car such as a hearse for everyday use? How would your friends, family, or significant other react? Since deviance is culturally defined, most of the decisions we make are dependent on the reactions of others. Is there anything the people in your life encourage you to do that you don't? Why don't you?

Exercise:**Problem:**

Think of a recent time when you used informal negative sanctions. To what act of deviance were you responding? How did your actions affect the deviant person or persons? How did your reaction help maintain social control?

Further Research

Although we rarely think of it in this way, deviance can have a positive effect on society. Check out the Positive Deviance Initiative, a program initiated by Tufts University to promote social movements around the world that strive to improve people's lives, at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Positive_Deviance.

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Glossary

deviance

a violation of contextual, cultural, or social norms

formal sanctions

sanctions that are officially recognized and enforced

informal sanctions

sanctions that occur in face-to-face interactions

negative sanctions

punishments for violating norms

positive sanctions

rewards given for conforming to norms

sanctions

the means of enforcing rules

social control

the regulation and enforcement of norms

social order

an arrangement of practices and behaviors on which society's members base their daily lives

Theoretical Perspectives on Deviance

- Describe the functionalist view of deviance in society through four sociologist's theories
- Explain how conflict theory understands deviance and crime in society
- Describe the symbolic interactionist approach to deviance, including labeling and other theories



Functionalists believe that deviance plays an important role in society and can be used to challenge people's views. Protesters, such as these PETA members, often use this method to draw attention to their cause. (Photo courtesy of David Shankbone/flickr)

Why does deviance occur? How does it affect a society? Since the early days of sociology, scholars have developed theories attempting to explain what deviance and crime mean to society. These theories can be grouped according to the three major sociological paradigms: functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory.

Functionalism

Sociologists who follow the functionalist approach are concerned with how the different elements of a society contribute to the whole. They view deviance as a key component of a functioning society. Strain theory, social

disorganization theory, and cultural deviance theory represent three functionalist perspectives on deviance in society.

Émile Durkheim: The Essential Nature of Deviance

Émile Durkheim believed that deviance is a necessary part of a successful society. One way deviance is functional, he argued, is that it challenges people's present views (1893). For instance, when black students across the United States participated in "sit-ins" during the civil rights movement, they challenged society's notions of segregation. Moreover, Durkheim noted, when deviance is punished, it reaffirms currently held social norms, which also contributes to society (1893). Seeing a student given detention for skipping class reminds other high schoolers that playing hooky isn't allowed and that they, too, could get detention.

Robert Merton: Strain Theory

Sociologist Robert Merton agreed that deviance is an inherent part of a functioning society, but he expanded on Durkheim's ideas by developing **strain theory**, which notes that access to socially acceptable goals plays a part in determining whether a person conforms or deviates. From birth, we're encouraged to achieve the "American Dream" of financial success. A woman who attends business school, receives her MBA, and goes on to make a million-dollar income as CEO of a company is said to be a success. However, not everyone in our society stands on equal footing. A person may have the socially acceptable goal of financial success but lack a socially acceptable way to reach that goal. According to Merton's theory, an entrepreneur who can't afford to launch his own company may be tempted to embezzle from his employer for start-up funds.

Merton defined five ways that people respond to this gap between having a socially accepted goal but no socially accepted way to pursue it.

1. *Conformity*: Those who conform choose not to deviate. They pursue their goals to the extent that they can through socially accepted means.
2. *Innovation*: Those who innovate pursue goals they cannot reach through legitimate means by instead using criminal or deviant means.
3. *Ritualism*: People who ritualize lower their goals until they can reach them through socially acceptable ways. These members of society focus on conformity rather than attaining a distant dream.
4. *Retreatism*: Others retreat and reject society's goals and means. Some beggars and street people have withdrawn from society's goal of financial success.
5. *Rebellion*: A handful of people rebel, replacing a society's goals and means with their own. Terrorists or freedom fighters look to overthrow a society's goals through socially unacceptable means.

Social Disorganization Theory

Developed by researchers at the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s, **social disorganization theory** asserts that crime is most likely to occur in communities with weak social ties and the absence of social control. An individual who grows up in a poor neighborhood with high rates of drug use, violence, teenage delinquency, and deprived parenting is more likely to become a criminal than an individual from a wealthy neighborhood with a good school system and families who are involved positively in the community.



Proponents of social disorganization theory believe that individuals who grow up in impoverished areas are more likely to participate in deviant or criminal behaviors. (Photo courtesy of Apollo 1758/Wikimedia Commons)

Social disorganization theory points to broad social factors as the cause of deviance. A person isn't born a criminal, but becomes one over time, often based on factors in his or her social environment. Research into social disorganization theory can greatly influence public policy. For instance, studies have found that children from disadvantaged communities who attend preschool programs that teach basic social skills are significantly less likely to engage in criminal activity.

Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay: Cultural Deviance Theory

Cultural deviance theory suggests that conformity to the prevailing cultural norms of lower-class society causes crime. Researchers Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942) studied crime patterns in Chicago in the early 1900s. They found that violence and crime were at their worst in the

middle of the city and gradually decreased the farther one traveled from the urban center toward the suburbs. Shaw and McKay noticed that this pattern matched the migration patterns of Chicago citizens. New immigrants, many of them poor and lacking knowledge of English, lived in neighborhoods inside the city. As the urban population expanded, wealthier people moved to the suburbs, leaving behind the less privileged.

Shaw and McKay concluded that socioeconomic status correlated to race and ethnicity resulted in a higher crime rate. The mix of cultures and values created a smaller society with different ideas of deviance, and those values and ideas were transferred from generation to generation.

The theory of Shaw and McKay has been further tested and expounded upon by Robert Sampson and Byron Groves (1989). They found that poverty, ethnic diversity, and family disruption in given localities had a strong positive correlation with social disorganization. They also determined that social disorganization was, in turn, associated with high rates of crime and delinquency—or deviance. Recent studies Sampson conducted with Lydia Bean (2006) revealed similar findings. High rates of poverty and single-parent homes correlated with high rates of juvenile violence.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory looks to social and economic factors as the causes of crime and deviance. Unlike functionalists, conflict theorists don't see these factors as positive functions of society, but as evidence of inequality in the system. They also challenge social disorganization theory and control theory, arguing that both ignore racial and socioeconomic issues and oversimplify social trends (Akers 1991). Conflict theorists also look for answers to the correlation of gender and race with wealth and crime.

Karl Marx: An Unequal System

Conflict theory is derived greatly from the work of sociologist, philosopher, and revolutionary Karl Marx. Marx divided the general population into two

rigid social groups: the proletariat and the bourgeois. The bourgeois are a small and wealthy segment of society who controls the means of production, while the proletariat is composed of the workers who rely on those means of production for employment and survival. By centralizing these vital resources into few hands, the bourgeois also has the means to control the way society is regulated—from laws, to government, to other authority agencies—which gives the bourgeois the opportunity to maintain and expand their power in society. Though Marx spoke little of deviance, his ideas created the foundation for conflict theorists who study the intersection of deviance and crime with wealth and power.

C. Wright Mills: The Power Elite

In his book *The Power Elite* (1956), sociologist C. Wright Mills described the existence of what he dubbed the **power elite**, a small group of wealthy and influential people at the top of society who hold the power and resources. Wealthy executives, politicians, celebrities, and military leaders often have access to national and international power, and in some cases, their decisions affect everyone in society. Because of this, the rules of society are stacked in favor of a privileged few who manipulate them to stay on top. It is these people who decide what is criminal and what is not, and the effects are often felt most by those who have little power. Mills' theories explain why celebrities such as Chris Brown and Paris Hilton, or once-powerful politicians such as Eliot Spitzer and Tom DeLay, can commit crimes with little or no legal retribution.

Crime and Social Class

While crime is often associated with the underprivileged, crimes committed by the wealthy and powerful remain an under-punished and costly problem within society. The FBI reported that victims of burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft lost a total of \$15.3 billion dollars in 2009 (FBI 2010). In comparison, when Bernie Madoff was arrested in 2008, the US Securities

and Exchange Commission reported that the estimated losses of his financial Ponzi scheme fraud were close to \$50 billion (SEC 2009).

This imbalance based on class power is also found within US criminal law. In the 1980s, the use of crack cocaine (cocaine in its purest form) quickly became an epidemic sweeping the country's poorest urban communities. Its pricier counterpart, cocaine, was associated with upscale users and was a drug of choice for the wealthy. The legal implications of being caught by authorities with crack versus cocaine were starkly different. In 1986, federal law mandated that being caught in possession of 50 grams of crack was punishable by a 10-year prison sentence. An equivalent prison sentence for cocaine possession, however, required possession of 5,000 grams. In other words, the sentencing disparity was 1 to 100 (New York Times Editorial Staff 2011). This inequality in the severity of punishment for crack versus cocaine paralleled the unequal social class of respective users. A conflict theorist would note that those in society who hold the power are also the ones who make the laws concerning crime. In doing so, they make laws that will benefit them, while the powerless classes who lack the resources to make such decisions suffer the consequences. The crack-cocaine punishment disparity remained until 2010, when President Obama signed the Fair Sentencing Act, which decreased the disparity to 1 to 18 (The Sentencing Project 2010).



From 1986 until 2010, the punishment for possessing crack, a “poor person’s drug,”

was 100 times stricter than the punishment for cocaine use, a drug favored by the wealthy.
(Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical approach that can be used to explain how societies and/or social groups come to view behaviors as deviant or conventional. Labeling theory, differential association, social disorganization theory, and control theory fall within the realm of symbolic interactionism.

Labeling Theory

Although all of us violate norms from time to time, few people would consider themselves deviant. Those who do, however, have often been labeled “deviant” by society and have gradually come to believe it themselves. **Labeling theory** examines the ascribing of a deviant behavior to another person by members of society. Thus, what is considered deviant is determined not so much by the behaviors themselves or the people who commit them, but by the reactions of others to these behaviors. As a result, what is considered deviant changes over time and can vary significantly across cultures.

Sociologist Edwin Lemert expanded on the concepts of labeling theory, identifying two types of deviance that affect identity formation. **Primary deviance** is a violation of norms that does not result in any long-term effects on the individual’s self-image or interactions with others. Speeding is a deviant act, but receiving a speeding ticket generally does not make others view you as a bad person, nor does it alter your own self-concept. Individuals who engage in primary deviance still maintain a feeling of

belonging in society and are likely to continue to conform to norms in the future.

Sometimes, in more extreme cases, primary deviance can morph into secondary deviance. **Secondary deviance** occurs when a person's self-concept and behavior begin to change after his or her actions are labeled as deviant by members of society. The person may begin to take on and fulfill the role of a "deviant" as an act of rebellion against the society that has labeled that individual as such. For example, consider a high school student who often cuts class and gets into fights. The student is reprimanded frequently by teachers and school staff, and soon enough, he develops a reputation as a "troublemaker." As a result, the student starts acting out even more and breaking more rules; he has adopted the "troublemaker" label and embraced this deviant identity. Secondary deviance can be so strong that it bestows a **master status** on an individual. A master status is a label that describes the chief characteristic of an individual. Some people see themselves primarily as doctors, artists, or grandfathers. Others see themselves as beggars, convicts, or addicts.

Note:

The Right to Vote

Before she lost her job as an administrative assistant, Leola Strickland postdated and mailed a handful of checks for amounts ranging from \$90 to \$500. By the time she was able to find a new job, the checks had bounced, and she was convicted of fraud under Mississippi law. Strickland pleaded guilty to a felony charge and repaid her debts; in return, she was spared from serving prison time.

Strickland appeared in court in 2001. More than ten years later, she is still feeling the sting of her sentencing. Why? Because Mississippi is one of 12 states in the United States that bans convicted felons from voting (ProCon 2011).

To Strickland, who said she had always voted, the news came as a great shock. She isn't alone. Some 5.3 million people in the United States are currently barred from voting because of felony convictions (ProCon 2009).

These individuals include inmates, parolees, probationers, and even people who have never been jailed, such as Leola Strickland.

Under the Fourteenth Amendment, states are allowed to deny voting privileges to individuals who have participated in “rebellion or other crime” (Krajick 2004). Although there are no federally mandated laws on the matter, most states practice at least one form of *felony disenfranchisement*. At present, it’s estimated that approximately 2.4 percent of the possible voting population is disenfranchised, that is, lacking the right to vote (ProCon 2011).

Is it fair to prevent citizens from participating in such an important process? Proponents of disenfranchisement laws argue that felons have a debt to pay to society. Being stripped of their right to vote is part of the punishment for criminal deeds. Such proponents point out that voting isn’t the only instance in which ex-felons are denied rights; state laws also ban released criminals from holding public office, obtaining professional licenses, and sometimes even inheriting property (Lott and Jones 2008). Opponents of felony disenfranchisement in the United States argue that voting is a basic human right and should be available to all citizens regardless of past deeds. Many point out that felony disenfranchisement has its roots in the 1800s, when it was used primarily to block black citizens from voting. Even nowadays, these laws disproportionately target poor minority members, denying them a chance to participate in a system that, as a social conflict theorist would point out, is already constructed to their disadvantage (Holding 2006). Those who cite labeling theory worry that denying deviants the right to vote will only further encourage deviant behavior. If ex-criminals are disenfranchised from voting, are they being disenfranchised from society?



Should a former felony conviction permanently strip a U.S. citizen of the right to vote? (Photo courtesy of Joshin Yamada/flickr)

Edwin Sutherland: Differential Association

In the early 1900s, sociologist Edwin Sutherland sought to understand how deviant behavior developed among people. Since criminology was a young field, he drew on other aspects of sociology including social interactions and group learning (Laub 2006). His conclusions established **differential association theory**, stating that individuals learn deviant behavior from those close to them who provide models of and opportunities for deviance. According to Sutherland, deviance is less a personal choice and more a

result of differential socialization processes. A tween whose friends are sexually active is more likely to view sexual activity as acceptable.

Sutherland's theory may account for why crime is multigenerational. A longitudinal study beginning in the 1960s found that the best predictor of antisocial and criminal behavior in children was whether their parents had been convicted of a crime (Todd and Jury 1996). Children who were younger than 10 when their parents were convicted were more likely than other children to engage in spousal abuse and criminal behavior by their early thirties. Even when taking socioeconomic factors such as dangerous neighborhoods, poor school systems, and overcrowded housing into consideration, researchers found that parents were the main influence on the behavior of their offspring (Todd and Jury 1996).

Travis Hirschi: Control Theory

Continuing with an examination of large social factors, **control theory** states that social control is directly affected by the strength of social bonds and that deviance results from a feeling of disconnection from society. Individuals who believe they are a part of society are less likely to commit crimes against it.

Travis Hirschi (1969) identified four types of social bonds that connect people to society:

1. *Attachment* measures our connections to others. When we are closely attached to people, we worry about their opinions of us. People conform to society's norms in order to gain approval (and prevent disapproval) from family, friends, and romantic partners.
2. *Commitment* refers to the investments we make in the community. A well-respected local businesswoman who volunteers at her synagogue and is a member of the neighborhood block organization has more to lose from committing a crime than a woman who doesn't have a career or ties to the community.
3. Similarly, levels of *involvement*, or participation in socially legitimate activities, lessen a person's likelihood of deviance. Children who are

- members of little league baseball teams have fewer family crises.
4. The final bond, *belief*, is an agreement on common values in society. If a person views social values as beliefs, he or she will conform to them. An environmentalist is more likely to pick up trash in a park because a clean environment is a social value to him (Hirschi 1969).

Summary

The three major sociological paradigms offer different explanations for the motivation behind deviance and crime. Functionalists point out that deviance is a social necessity since it reinforces norms by reminding people of the consequences of violating them. Violating norms can open society's eyes to injustice in the system. Conflict theorists argue that crime stems from a system of inequality that keeps those with power at the top and those without power at the bottom. Symbolic interactionists focus attention on the socially constructed nature of the labels related to deviance. Crime and deviance are learned from the environment and enforced or discouraged by those around us.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

A student wakes up late and realizes her sociology exam starts in five minutes. She jumps into her car and speeds down the road, where she is pulled over by a police officer. The student explains that she is running late, and the officer lets her off with a warning. The student's actions are an example of _____.

- a. primary deviance
- b. positive deviance
- c. secondary deviance
- d. master deviance

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

According to C. Wright Mills, which of the following people is most likely to be a member of the power elite?

- a. A war veteran
- b. A senator
- c. A professor
- d. A mechanic

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

According to social disorganization theory, crime is most likely to occur where?

- a. A community where neighbors don't know each other very well
- b. A neighborhood with mostly elderly citizens
- c. A city with a large minority population
- d. A college campus with students who are very competitive

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Shaw and McKay found that crime is linked primarily to _____.

- a. power
- b. master status
- c. family values
- d. wealth

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

According to the concept of the power elite, why would a celebrity such as Charlie Sheen commit a crime?

- a. Because his parents committed similar crimes
- b. Because his fame protects him from retribution
- c. Because his fame disconnects him from society
- d. Because he is challenging socially accepted norms

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

A convicted sexual offender is released on parole and arrested two weeks later for repeated sexual crimes. How would labeling theory explain this?

- a. The offender has been labeled deviant by society and has accepted a new master status.
 - b. The offender has returned to his old neighborhood and so reestablished his former habits.
 - c. The offender has lost the social bonds he made in prison and feels disconnected from society.
 - d. The offender is poor and responding to the different cultural values that exist in his community.
-

Solution:**Answer**

A

Exercise:**Problem:**

_____ deviance is a violation of norms that _____ result in a person being labeled a deviant.

- a. Secondary; does not
 - b. Negative; does
 - c. Primary; does not
 - d. Primary; may or may not
-

Solution:**Answer**

C

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Pick a famous politician, business leader, or celebrity who has been arrested recently. What crime did he or she allegedly commit? Who was the victim? Explain his or her actions from the point of view of one of the major sociological paradigms. What factors best explain how this person might be punished if convicted of the crime?

Exercise:

Problem:

If we assume that the power elite's status is always passed down from generation to generation, how would Edwin Sutherland explain these patterns of power through differential association theory? What crimes do these elite few get away with?

Further Research

The Skull and Bones Society made news in 2004 when it was revealed that then-President George W. Bush and his Democratic challenger, John Kerry, had both been members at Yale University. In the years since, conspiracy theorists have linked the secret society to numerous world events, arguing that many of the nation's most powerful people are former Bonesmen. Although such ideas may raise a lot of skepticism, many influential people of the past century have been Skull and Bones Society members, and the society is sometimes described as a college version of the power elite. Journalist Rebecca Leung discusses the roots of the club and the impact its ties between decision-makers can have later in life. Read about it at [http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Skull and Bones](http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Skull_and_Bones).

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Glossary

control theory

theory that states social control is directly affected by the strength of social bonds and that deviance results from a feeling of disconnection from society

cultural deviance theory

theory that suggests conformity to the prevailing cultural norms of lower-class society causes crime

differential association theory

theory that states individuals learn deviant behavior from those close to them who provide models of and opportunities for deviance

labeling theory

the ascribing of a deviant behavior to another person by members of society

master status

a label that describes the chief characteristic of an individual

power elite

a small group of wealthy and influential people at the top of society who hold the power and resources

primary deviance

a violation of norms that does not result in any long-term effects on the individual's self-image or interactions with others

secondary deviance

occurs when a person's self-concept and behavior begin to change after his or her actions are labeled as deviant by members of society

social disorganization theory

theory that asserts crime occurs in communities with weak social ties and the absence of social control

strain theory

theory that addresses the relationship between having socially acceptable goals and having socially acceptable means to reach those goals

Crime and the Law

- Identify and differentiate between different types of crimes
- Evaluate U.S. crime statistics
- Understand the three branches of the U.S. criminal justice system



How is a crime different from other types of deviance? (Photo courtesy of Duffman/Wikimedia Commons.)

On December 16, 2011, 20-year-old Colton Harris-Moore was sentenced to seven years in prison by an Island County judge after pleading guilty to dozens of charges including burglary, fraud, and identity theft. Harris-Moore, dubbed the “Barefoot Bandit,” spent two years evading the police by means of transportation theft and squatting, frequently leaving a trail of bare footprints in his wake (Johnson 2011).

"Colton's very pleased (with the sentence)," his attorney John Henry Browne told the *New York Times*. "He was expecting the worst."

The son of an alcoholic mother, Harris-Moore’s life was filled with physical and verbal abuse, and a series of convict boyfriends frequently inhabited the Harris-Moore home. After dropping out of school in the ninth grade, Harris Moore’s crimes increased in severity. His antics gained worldwide media

attention after he began stealing and successfully piloting planes, though he'd had no aviation training. When authorities caught him, he was driving a stolen boat off the coast of the Bahamas (Yardley 2010).

"This case is a tragedy in many ways," said Judge Churchill, "but it's a triumph of the human spirit in other ways. I could have been reading about the history of a mass murderer. I could have been reading about a drug abusive, alcoholic young man. That is the triumph of Colton Harris-Moore: He has survived" (Johnson 2011).

Though the judge's ruling was largely sympathetic, Harris-Moore had immediate regrets. "Let me put it this way," said his attorney. "He wishes he had done things a little differently in his life" (CNN News Wire Staff 2010).

Although deviance is a violation of social norms, it's not always punishable, and it's not necessarily bad. **Crime**, on the other hand, is a behavior that violates official law and is punishable through formal sanctions. Walking to class backwards is a deviant behavior. Driving with a blood alcohol percentage over the state's limit is a crime. Like other forms of deviance, however, ambiguity exists concerning what constitutes a crime and whether all crimes are, in fact, "bad" and deserve punishment. For example, during the 1960s, civil rights activists often violated laws intentionally as part of their effort to bring about racial equality. In hindsight, we recognize that the laws that deemed many of their actions crimes—for instance, Rosa Parks taking a seat in the "whites only" section of the bus—were inconsistent with social equality.

As you learned previously, all societies have informal and formal ways of maintaining social control. Within these systems of norms, societies have **legal codes** that maintain formal social control through laws, which are rules adopted and enforced by a political authority. Those who violate these rules incur negative formal sanctions. Normally, punishments are relative to the degree of the crime and the importance to society of the value underlying the law. As we will see, however, there are other factors that influence criminal sentencing.

Types of Crimes

Not all crimes are given equal weight. Society generally socializes its members to view certain crimes as more severe than others. For example, most people would consider murdering someone to be far worse than stealing a wallet and would expect a murderer to be punished more severely than a thief. In modern American society, crimes are classified as one of two types based on their severity. **Violent crimes** (also known as “crimes against a person”) are based on the use of force or the threat of force. Rape, murder, and armed robbery fall under this category. **Nonviolent crimes** involve the destruction or theft of property, but do not use force or the threat of force. Because of this, they are also sometimes called “property crimes.” Larceny, car theft, and vandalism are all types of nonviolent crimes. If you use a crowbar to break into a car, you are committing a nonviolent crime; if you mug someone with the crowbar, you are committing a violent crime.

When we think of crime, we often picture **street crime**, or offenses committed by ordinary people against other people or organizations, usually in public spaces. An often overlooked category is **corporate crime**, or crime committed by white-collar workers in a business environment. Embezzlement, insider trading, and identity theft are all types of corporate crime. Although these types of offenses rarely receive the same amount of media coverage as street crimes, they can be far more damaging. The current economic recession in the United States is the ultimate result of a financial collapse triggered by corporate crime.

An often-debated third type of crime is **victimless crime**. These are called victimless because the perpetrator is not explicitly harming another person. As opposed to battery or theft, which clearly have a victim, a crime like drinking a beer at age 20 or selling a sexual act do not result in injury to anyone other than the individual who engages in them, although they are illegal. While some claim acts like these are victimless, others argue that they actually do harm society. Prostitution may foster abuse toward women by clients or pimps. Drug use may increase the likelihood of employee absences. Such debates highlight how the deviant and criminal nature of actions develops through ongoing public discussion.

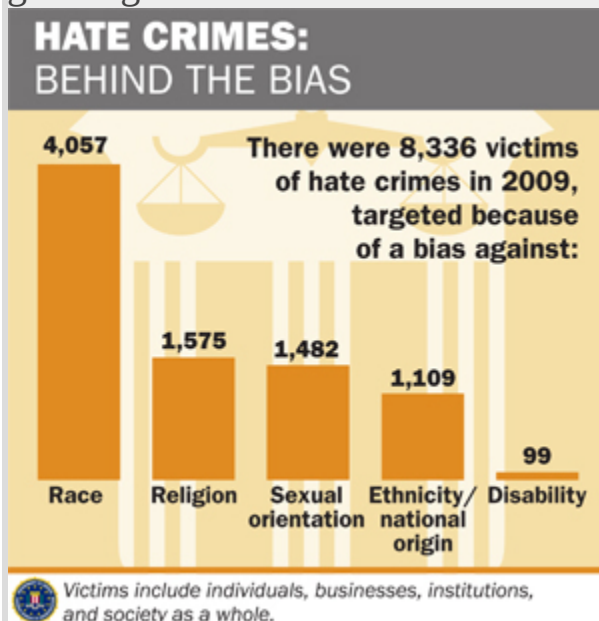
Note:

Hate Crimes

On the evening of October 3, 2010, a 17-year-old boy from the Bronx was abducted by a group of young men from his neighborhood and taken to an abandoned row house. After being beaten, the boy admitted he was gay. His attackers seized his partner and beat him as well. Both victims were drugged, sodomized, and forced to burn one another with cigarettes. When questioned by police, the ringleader of the crime explained that the victims were gay and “looked like [they] liked it” (Wilson and Baker 2010).

Attacks based on a person’s race, religion, or other characteristics are known as **hate crimes**. Hate crimes in the United States evolved from the time of early European settlers and their violence toward Native Americans. Such crimes weren’t investigated until the early 1900s, when the Ku Klux Klan began to draw national attention for its activities against blacks and other groups. The term “hate crime,” however, didn’t become official until the 1980s (Federal Bureau of Investigations 2011).

An average of 195,000 Americans fall victim to hate crimes each year, but fewer than five percent ever report the crime (FBI 2010). The majority of hate crimes are racially motivated, but many are based on religious (especially anti-Semitic) prejudice (FBI 2010). After incidents like the murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming in 1998 and the tragic suicide of Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi in 2010, there has been a growing awareness of hate crimes based on sexual orientation.



In the United States, there were

8,336 reported victims of hate crimes in 2009. This represents less than five percent of the number of people who claimed to be victims of hate crimes when surveyed. (Graph courtesy of FBI 2010)

Crime Statistics

What crimes are people in the United States most likely to commit, and who is most likely to commit them? To understand criminal statistics, you must first understand how these statistics are collected.

Since 1930, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been collecting and publishing an archive of crime statistics. Known as *Uniform Crime Reports* (UCR), these annual publications contain data from approximately 17,000 law enforcement agencies (FBI 2011). Although the UCR contains comprehensive data on police reports, it fails to take into account the fact that many crimes go unreported due to the victim's unwillingness to report them, largely based on fear, shame, or distrust of the police. The quality of the data collected by the UCR also varies greatly. Because officers' approaches to gathering victims' accounts frequently differed, important details were not always asked for or reported (Cantor and Lynch 2000).

To offset this publication, in 1973 the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics began to publish a separate report known as the *National Crime Victimization Survey* (NCVS). The NCVS is a **self-report study**. A self-report study is a collection of data acquired using voluntary response methods, such as questionnaires or telephone interviews. Each year, survey data are gathered from approximately 135,000 people in the United States on the frequency and type of crime they experience in their daily lives (BJS 2011). The surveys are thorough, providing a wider scope of information

than was previously available. This allows researchers to examine crime from more detailed perspectives and to analyze the data based on factors such as the relationship between victims and offenders, the consequences of the crimes, and substance abuse involved in the crimes. Demographics are also analyzed, such as age, race, gender, location, and income level (National Archive of Criminal Justice Data 2010). The NCVS reports a higher rate of crime than the UCR.

Though the NCVS is a critical source of statistical information, disadvantages exist. “Non-response,” or a victim’s failure to participate in the survey or a particular question, is among them. Inability to contact important demographics, such as those who don’t have access to phones or frequently relocate, also skews the data. For those who participate, memory issues can be problematic for the data sets. Some victims’ recollection of the crimes can be inaccurate or simply forgotten over time (Cantor and Lynch 2000).

While neither of these publications can take into account all of the crimes committed in the country, some general trends may be noted. Crime rates were on the rise after 1960, but following an all-time high in the 1980s and 1990s, rates of violent and non-violent crimes once again started to decline.

In 2009, approximately 4.3 million violent crimes occurred in the United States, the majority being assault and robbery. An estimated 15.6 million nonviolent crimes took place, the most common being larceny. Less than half of all violent and nonviolent crimes were reported to the police (BJS 2010).

In general, demographic patterns tend to correlate with crime: factors such as sex and socioeconomic status may relate to a person’s chances of being a crime victim or a perpetrator. Women are much more likely than men to be victimized by someone they know, such as a family member or friend, and one-fourth of all nonfatal attacks on women are carried out by a romantic partner (BJS 2011b).

The United States Criminal Justice System

A **criminal justice system** is an organization that exists to enforce a legal code. There are three branches of the United States criminal justice system: the police, the courts, and the corrections system.

Police

Police are a civil force in charge of enforcing laws and public order at a federal, state, or community level. No unified national police force exists in the United States, although there are federal law enforcement officers. Federal officers operate under specific government agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI); the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF); and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Federal officers can only deal with matters that are explicitly within the power of the federal government, and their field of expertise is usually narrow. A county police officer may spend time responding to emergency calls, working at the local jail, or patrolling areas as needed, whereas a federal officer would be more likely to investigate suspects in firearms trafficking or provide security for government officials.

State police have the authority to enforce statewide laws, including regulating traffic on highways. Local or county police, on the other hand, have a limited jurisdiction with authority only in the town or county in which they serve.



Here, Afghan National Police
Crisis Response Unit members
train in Surobi, Afghanistan.

(Photo courtesy of
isafmedia/flickr)

Courts

Once a crime has been committed and a violator is identified by the police, the case goes to the court. A **court** is a system that has the authority to make decisions based on law. Similar to the police, the U.S. judicial system is divided into federal courts and state courts. As the name implies, federal courts (including the U.S. Supreme Court) deal with federal matters, including trade disputes, military justice, and government lawsuits. Judges who preside over federal courts are selected by the president with the consent of Congress.

State courts vary in their structure, but generally include three levels: trial courts, appellate courts, and state supreme courts. Unlike the large courtroom trials in TV shows, most noncriminal cases are decided by a judge without a jury present. Traffic court and small claims court are both types of trial courts that handle specific civil matters.

Criminal cases are heard by trial courts that handle general jurisdictions. Usually, a judge and jury are both present. It is the jury's responsibility to determine guilt, and the judge's responsibility to determine the penalty, though in some states, the jury may also decide the penalty. Unless a defendant is found "not guilty," any member of the prosecution or defense can appeal the case to a higher court. In some states, the case then goes to a special appellate court; in others, it goes to the highest state court, often known as the state supreme court.



This county courthouse in Kansas (top) is a typical setting for a state trial court. Compare this to the courtroom of the Michigan Supreme Court (bottom). (Photo (a) courtesy of Ammodramus/Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of Steve & Christine/Wikimedia Commons)

Corrections

The **corrections system**, more commonly known as the prison system, is tasked with supervising individuals who have been arrested, convicted, and sentenced for a criminal offense. At the end of 2010, approximately seven million Americans were behind bars (BJS 2011d).

The United States incarceration rate has grown considerably in the last hundred years. In 2008, more than 1 in 100 U.S. adults were in jail or prison, the highest benchmark in our nation's history. And while Americans account for 5 percent of the global population, we have 25 percent of the world's inmates, the largest number of prisoners in the world (Liptak 2008b).

Prison is different from jail. A jail provides temporary confinement, usually while an individual awaits trial or parole. Prisons are facilities built for individuals serving sentences of more than a year. Whereas jails are small

and local, prisons are large and run by either the state or the federal government.

Parole refers to a temporary release from prison or jail that requires supervision and the consent of officials. Parole is different from probation, which is supervised time used as an alternative to prison. Probation and parole can both follow a period of incarceration in prison, especially if the prison sentence is shortened.

Summary

Crime is established by legal codes and upheld by the criminal justice system. In the United States, there are three branches of the justice system: police, courts, and corrections. Although crime rates increased throughout most of the 20th century, they are now dropping.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: Which of the following is an example of corporate crime?

- a. Embezzlement
- b. Larceny
- c. Assault
- d. Burglary

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem: Spousal abuse is an example of a _____.

- a. street crime
 - b. corporate crime
 - c. violent crime
 - d. nonviolent crime
-

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following situations best describes crime trends in the United States?

- a. Rates of violent and nonviolent crimes are decreasing.
 - b. Rates of violent crimes are decreasing, but there are more nonviolent crimes now than ever before.
 - c. Crime rates have skyrocketed since the 1970s due to lax corrections laws.
 - d. Rates of street crime have gone up, but corporate crime has gone down.
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

What is a disadvantage of the *National Crime Victimization Survey* (NCVS)?

- a. The NCVS doesn't include demographic data, such as age or gender.
 - b. The NCVS may be unable to reach important groups, such as those without phones.
 - c. The NCVS doesn't address the relationship between the criminal and the victim.
 - d. The NCVS only includes information collected by police officers.
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Recall the crime statistics presented in this section. Do they surprise you? Are these statistics represented accurately in the media? Why or why not?

Further Research

Is the U.S. criminal justice system confusing? You're not alone. Check out this handy flowchart from the Bureau of Justice Statistics:

http://openstaxcollege.org/l/US_Criminal_Justice_BJS

How is crime data collected in the United States? Read about the methods of data collection and take the National Crime Victimization Survey. Visit

http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Victimization_Survey.

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Glossary

corporate crime

crime committed by white-collar workers in a business environment

corrections system

the system tasked with supervising individuals who have been arrested for, convicted of, or sentenced for criminal offenses

court

a system that has the authority to make decisions based on law

crime

a behavior that violates official law and is punishable through formal sanctions

criminal justice system

an organization that exists to enforce a legal code

hate crimes

attacks based on a person's race, religion, or other characteristics

legal codes

codes that maintain formal social control through laws

nonviolent crimes

crimes that involve the destruction or theft of property, but do not use force or the threat of force

police

a civil force in charge of regulating laws and public order at a federal, state, or community level

self-report study

collection of data acquired using voluntary response methods, such as questionnaires or telephone interviews

street crime

crime committed by average people against other people or organizations, usually in public spaces

victimless crime

activities against the law, but that do not result in injury to any individual other than the person who engages in them

violent crimes

crimes based on the use of force or the threat of force

Introduction to Social Stratification in the United States

class="introduction"

The car a
person drives
can be seen
as a symbol
of money and
power. This
Rolls Royce
sits outside
the Bellagio
Hotel in Las
Vegas,
Nevada.
(Photo
courtesy of
dave_7/flickr
)



Robert and Joan have spent their entire lives in Cudahy, Wisconsin, a small town of about 18,000. The high school sweethearts got married after graduation and later bought a house. After Robert served two years in the Army, he came home and accepted a job in a foundry, working on machinery and equipment. Joan worked as a hotel receptionist until she quit her job to raise their two children, Michael and Lisa.

Robert and Joan worked hard to make sure their kids had good lives. The kids went to Cudahy High School, like their parents, and took part in many extracurricular activities. Michael played football and Lisa participated in the debate team and Spanish Club, and served as class vice president.

After high school, Michael's and Lisa's lives took two divergent paths. Michael stayed close to home, earning a degree in hotel management at a community college. He began working the front desk of a downtown Milwaukee hotel, a job similar to the one his mother held so long ago. He

married Donna, a high school classmate who now worked in a day-care center. The couple bought a house two miles from his parents and eventually had three children of their own.

Lisa's experiences, meanwhile, took her from place to place. She double-majored in psychology and social work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, then was accepted to the University of California-Berkeley, where she earned her master's and doctoral degrees in Social Welfare. She worked as a teaching assistant and helped organize a summit on institutional racism. Lisa received a grant to start a Hispanic youth program in Denver, Colorado. There, she met Mario, a cook, and helped him learn English. The couple soon got married and moved into an apartment in a poor section of the city. They had a daughter, Alaina.

Soon after, Lisa accepted an assistant professorship at the University of Colorado. That summer, while visiting her hometown of Cudahy, Lisa revealed some surprising news to her parents. She explained that she, Mario, and Alaina, were moving to Torreón, Mexico, to be close to Mario's family. Lisa would do research for a book proposal she'd written and guest lectured at the nearby university. They planned to return in two or three years, in time for Alaina to start school in the United States.

Robert and Joan were proud of their children. Michael and Lisa both had happy marriages, healthy children, and secure jobs. However, Robert and Joan puzzled over the different life paths their children took. Michael married a local woman, worked in the area, and stayed close with family and friends. Lisa moved far from home, married a foreigner, was fluent in two languages, and wanted to live in a foreign country. Joan and Robert had trouble understanding their daughter's choices. Michael was a chip off the old block, while Lisa seemed like a stranger.

What Is Social Stratification?

- Differentiate between open and closed stratification systems
- Distinguish between caste and class systems
- Understand meritocracy as an ideal system of stratification



In the upper echelons of the working world, people with the most power reach the top. These people make the decisions and earn the most money. The majority of Americans will never see the view from the top. (Photo courtesy of Alex Proimos/flickr)

In the opening story, two siblings chose different life paths. Michael stayed within his parents' social realm, achieving similar levels of education, occupation, and income. He retained social ties with community members. Lisa, however, rose from her parents' social position, achieving higher levels of education, occupation, and income. She broke old social ties and formed new ties, disregarding barriers and norms of race, gender, and class. Despite their different paths, both siblings were influenced by the social position of their parents. What determines a person's social standing? And how does social standing direct or limit a person's choices?

Sociologists use the term social stratification to describe the system of social standing. **Social stratification** refers to a society's categorization of its people into rankings of socioeconomic tiers based on factors like wealth, income, race, education, and power.

You may remember the word “stratification” from geology class. The distinct vertical layers found in rock, called stratification, are a good way to visualize social structure. Society's layers are made of people, and society's resources are distributed unevenly throughout the layers. The people who have more resources represent the top layer of the social structure of stratification. Other groups of people, with progressively fewer and fewer resources, represent the lower layers of our society.



Strata in rock illustrate social stratification. People are sorted, or layered, into social categories. Many factors determine a person's social

standing, such as income, education, occupation, as well as age, race, gender, and even physical abilities. (Photo courtesy of Just a Prairie Boy/flickr)

In the United States, people like to believe everyone has an equal chance at success. To a certain extent, Michael and Lisa illustrate the belief that hard work and talent—not prejudicial treatment or societal values—determine social rank. This emphasis on self-effort perpetuates the belief that people control their own social standing.

However, sociologists recognize that social stratification is a society-wide system that makes inequalities apparent. While there are always inequalities between individuals, sociologists are interested in larger social patterns. Stratification is not about individual inequalities, but about systematic inequalities based on group membership, classes, and the like. No individual, rich or poor, can be blamed for social inequalities. A person's social standing is affected by the structure of society. Although individuals may support or fight inequalities, social stratification is created and supported by society as a whole.



The people who live in these houses most likely share similar levels of income and education. Neighborhoods often house people of the same social standing. Wealthy families do not typically live next door to poorer families, though this varies depending on the particular city and country.
(Photo courtesy of Orin Zebest/flickr)

Factors that define stratification vary in different societies. In most societies, stratification is an economic system, based on **wealth**, the net value of money and assets a person has, and **income**, a person's wages or investment dividends. While people are regularly categorized based on how rich or poor they are, other important factors influence social standing. For example, in some cultures, wisdom and charisma are valued, and people who have them are revered more than those who don't. In some cultures, the elderly are esteemed; in others, the elderly are disparaged or overlooked. Societies' cultural beliefs often reinforce the inequalities of stratification.

One key determinant of social standing is the social standing of one's parents. Parents tend to pass their social position on to their children. People inherit not only social standing but also the cultural norms that accompany a certain lifestyle. They share these with a network of friends and family members. Social standing becomes a comfort zone, a familiar lifestyle, and an identity.

Other determinants are found in a society's occupational structure. Teachers, for example, often have high levels of education but receive relatively low pay. Many believe that teaching is a noble profession, so teachers should do their jobs for love of their profession and the good of their students, not for money. Yet no successful executive or entrepreneur would embrace that attitude in the business world, where profits are valued as a driving force. Cultural attitudes and beliefs like these support and perpetuate social inequalities.

Systems of Stratification

Sociologists distinguish between two types of systems of stratification. Closed systems accommodate little change in social position. They do not allow people to shift levels and do not permit social relations between levels. Open systems, which are based on achievement, allow movement and interaction between layers and classes. Different systems reflect, emphasize, and foster certain cultural values, and shape individual beliefs. Stratification systems include class systems and caste systems, as well as meritocracy.

The Caste System



India used to have a rigid caste system. The people in the lowest caste suffered from extreme poverty and were shunned by society. Some aspects of India's defunct caste system remain socially relevant. In this photo, an Indian woman of a specific Hindu caste works in construction, demolishing

and building houses. (Photo courtesy of
Elessar/flickr)

Caste systems are closed stratification systems in which people can do little or nothing to change their social standing. A **caste system** is one in which people are born into their social standing and will remain in it their whole lives. People are assigned occupations regardless of their talents, interests, or potential. There are virtually no opportunities to improve one's social position.

In the Hindu caste tradition, people were expected to work in the occupation of their caste and to enter into marriage according to their caste. Accepting this social standing was considered a moral duty. Cultural values reinforced the system. Caste systems promote beliefs in fate, destiny, and the will of a higher power, rather than promoting individual freedom as a value. A person who lived in a caste society was socialized to accept his or her social standing.

Although the caste system in India has been officially dismantled, its residual presence in Indian society is deeply embedded. In rural areas, aspects of the tradition are more likely to remain, while urban centers show less evidence of this past. In India's larger cities, people now have more opportunities to choose their own career paths and marriage partners. As a global center of employment, corporations have introduced merit-based hiring and employment to the nation.

The Class System

A **class system** is based on both social factors and individual achievement. A **class** consists of a set of people who share similar status with regard to factors like wealth, income, education, and occupation. Unlike caste systems, class systems are open. People are free to gain a different level of education or employment than their parents. They can also socialize with and marry members of other classes, allowing people to move from one class to another.

In a class system, occupation is not fixed at birth. Though family and other societal models help guide a person toward a career, personal choice plays a role. Michael, the sibling in the chapter opening, chose a career similar to that of his parents. His sister Lisa chose a career based on individual interests that differed from her parents' social class.

In class systems, people have the option to form **exogamous** marriages, unions of spouses from different social categories. Marriage in these circumstances is based on values such as love and compatibility rather than on social standing or economics. Though social conformities still exist that encourage people to choose partners within their own class, people are not as pressured to choose marriage partners based solely on those elements. For example, although Michael formed an **endogamous** union, marrying a partner from his same social background, Lisa formed an exogamous union, marrying someone outside her social categories.

Meritocracy

Meritocracy is another system of social stratification in which personal effort—or merit—determines social standing. High levels of effort will lead to a high social position, and vice versa. The concept of meritocracy is an ideal—that is, a society has never existed where social rank was based purely on merit. Because of the complex structure of societies, processes like socialization, and the realities of economic systems, social standing is influenced by multiple factors, not merit alone. Inheritance and pressure to conform to norms, for instance, disrupt the notion of a pure meritocracy. Sociologists see aspects of meritocracies in modern societies when they study the role of academic performance and job performance, and the systems in place for evaluating and rewarding achievement in these areas.

Status Consistency

Social stratification systems determine social position based on factors like income, education, and occupation. Sociologists use the term **status consistency** to describe the consistency, or lack thereof, of an individual's

rank across these factors. Caste systems correlate with high status consistency, whereas the more flexible class system has lower status consistency.

To illustrate, let's consider Susan. Susan earned her high school degree but did not go on to college. That factor is a trait of the lower-middle class. She began doing landscaping work, which, as manual labor, is also a trait of lower-middle or even lower class. However, over time, Susan started her own company. She hired employees. She won larger contracts. She became a business owner and earned a lot of money. Those traits represent the upper-middle class. Here there are inconsistencies between Susan's educational level, her occupation, and her income. In a class system, a person can work hard and have little education and still be in middle or upper class, whereas in a caste system that would not be possible. In a class system, low status consistency correlates with having more choices and opportunities.

Note:

The Commoner Who Could Be Queen



Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, who is in line to be king of England, married Catherine Middleton, a so-called commoner,

meaning she does not have royal ancestry.
(Photo courtesy of UK_repsome/flickr)

On April 29, 2011, in London, England, Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, married Catherine Middleton, a commoner. It is rare, though not unheard of, for a member of the British royal family to marry a commoner. Kate Middleton had a middle-class upbringing. Her father was a former flight dispatcher and her mother a former flight attendant. Kate and William met when they were both students at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland (Köhler 2010).

Britain's monarchy arose during the Middle Ages. Its social hierarchy placed royalty at the top and commoners on the bottom. This was generally a closed system, with people born into positions of nobility. Wealth was passed from generation to generation through **primogeniture**, a law stating that all property would be inherited by the firstborn son. If the family had no son, the land went to the next closest male relation. Women could not inherit property and their social standing was primarily determined through marriage.

The arrival of the Industrial Revolution changed Britain's social structure. Commoners moved to cities, got jobs, and made better livings. Gradually, people found new opportunities to increase their wealth and power. Today, the government is a constitutional monarchy with the prime minister and other ministers elected to their positions, and with the royal family's role being largely ceremonial. The long-ago differences between nobility and commoners have blurred, and the modern class system in Britain is similar to that of the United States (McKee 1996).

Today, the royal family still commands wealth, power, and a great deal of attention. When Queen Elizabeth II retires or passes away, Prince Charles will be first in line to ascend the throne. If he abdicates (chooses not to become king) or dies, the position will go to Prince William. If that happens, Kate Middleton will be called Queen Catherine and hold the position of queen consort. She will be one of the few queens in history to have earned a college degree (Marquand 2011).

There is a great deal of social pressure on her not only to behave as a royal but to bear children. The royal family recently changed its succession laws to allow daughters, not just sons, to ascend the throne. Kate's experience—

from commoner to possible queen—demonstrates the fluidity of social position in modern society.

Summary

Stratification systems are either closed, meaning they allow little change in social position, or open, meaning they allow movement and interaction between the layers. A caste system is one in which social standing is based on ascribed status or birth. Class systems are open, with achievement playing a role in social position. People fall into classes based on factors like wealth, income, education, and occupation. A meritocracy is a system of social stratification that confers standing based on personal worth, rewarding effort.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: What factor makes caste systems closed?

- a. They are run by secretive governments.
- b. People cannot change their social standings.
- c. Most have been outlawed.
- d. They exist only in rural areas.

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem: What factor makes class systems open?

- a. They allow for movement between the classes.
 - b. People are more open-minded.
 - c. People are encouraged to socialize within their class.
 - d. They do not have clearly defined layers.
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem: Which of these systems allows for the most social mobility?

- a. Caste
 - b. Monarchy
 - c. Endogamy
 - d. Class
-

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

Which person best illustrates opportunities for upward social mobility in the United States?

- a. First-shift factory worker
 - b. First-generation college student
 - c. Firstborn son who inherits the family business
 - d. First-time interviewee who is hired for a job
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem: Which statement illustrates low status consistency?

- a. A suburban family lives in a modest ranch home and enjoys nice vacation each summer.
- b. A single mother receives food stamps and struggles to find adequate employment.
- c. A college dropout launches an online company that earns millions in its first year.
- d. A celebrity actress owns homes in three countries.

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem: Based on meritocracy, a physician's assistant would:

- a. receive the same pay as all the other physician's assistants
- b. be encouraged to earn a higher degree to seek a better position
- c. most likely marry a professional at the same level
- d. earn a pay raise for doing excellent work

Solution:

Answer

D

Short Answer

Exercise:**Problem:**

Track the social stratification of your family tree. Did the social standing of your parents differ from the social standing of your grandparents and great-grandparents? What social traits were handed down by your forebears? Are there any exogamous marriages in your history? Does your family exhibit status consistencies or inconsistencies?

Exercise:**Problem:**

What defines communities that have low status consistency? What are the ramifications, both positive and negative, of cultures with low status consistency? Try to think of specific examples to support your ideas.

Exercise:**Problem:**

Review the concept of stratification. Now choose a group of people you have observed and been a part of—for example, cousins, high school friends, classmates, sport teammates, or coworkers. How does the structure of the social group you chose adhere to the concept of stratification?

Further Research

The *New York Times* investigated social stratification in their series of articles called “Class Matters.” The online accompaniment to the series includes an interactive graphic called “How Class Works,” which tallies four factors—occupation, education, income, and wealth—and places an individual within a certain class and percentile. What class describes you? Test your class rank on the interactive site:

http://openstaxcollege.org/l/NY_Times_how_class_works

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Glossary

caste system

a system in which people are born into a social standing that they will retain their entire lives

class

a group who shares a common social status based on factors like wealth, income, education, and occupation

class system

social standing based on social factors and individual accomplishments

endogamous marriages

unions of people within the same social category

exogamous marriages

unions of spouses from different social categories

income

the money a person earns from work or investments

meritocracy

an ideal system in which personal effort—or merit—determines social standing

primogeniture

a law stating that all property passes to the firstborn son

social stratification

a socioeconomic system that divides society's members into categories ranking from high to low, based on things like wealth, power, and prestige

status consistency

the consistency, or lack thereof, of an individual's rank across social categories like income, education, and occupation

wealth

the value of money and assets a person has from, for example, inheritance

Social Stratification and Mobility in the United States

- Understand America's class structure
- Describe several types of social mobility
- Recognize characteristics that define and identify class

Most sociologists define social class as a grouping based on similar social factors like wealth, income, education, and occupation. These factors affect how much power and prestige a person has. Social stratification reflects an unequal distribution of resources. In most cases, having more money means having more power or more opportunities. Stratification can also result from physical and intellectual traits. Categories that affect social standing include family ancestry, race, ethnicity, age, and gender. In the United States, standing can also be defined by characteristics such as IQ, athletic abilities, appearance, personal skills, and achievements.

Standard of Living

In the last century, the United States has seen a steady rise in its **standard of living**, the level of wealth available to a certain socioeconomic class in order to acquire the material necessities and comforts to maintain its lifestyle. The standard of living is based on factors such as income, employment, class, poverty rates, and affordability of housing. Because standard of living is closely related to quality of life, it can represent factors such as the ability to afford a home, own a car, and take vacations.

In the United States, a small portion of the population has the means to the highest standard of living. A Federal Reserve Bank study in 2009 showed that a mere one percent of the population holds one third of our nation's wealth (Kennickell 2009). Wealthy people receive the most schooling, have better health, and consume the most goods and services. Wealthy people also wield decision-making power. Many people think of the United States as a "middle-class society." They think a few people are rich, a few are poor, and most are pretty well off, existing in the middle of the social strata. But as the study above indicates, there is not an even distribution of wealth. Millions of women and men struggle to pay rent, buy food, find work, and afford basic medical care.

In the United States, as in most high-income nations, social stratifications and standards of living are in part based on occupation (Lin and Xie 1988). Aside from the obvious impact that income has on someone's standard of living, occupations also influence social standing through the relative levels of prestige they afford. Employment in medicine, law, or engineering confers high status. Teachers and police officers are generally respected, though not considered particularly prestigious. On the other end of the scale, some of the lowest rankings apply to positions like waitress, janitor, and bus driver.

Social Classes in the United States



Does taste or fashion sense indicate class? Is there any way to tell if this young man comes from an upper, middle, or lower class background? (Photo courtesy of Kelly Bailey/flickr)

Does a person's appearance indicate class? Can you tell a man's education level based on his clothing? Do you know a woman's income by the car she

drives? There may have been a time in the United States when people's class was more visibly apparent. Today, however, it is harder to determine class.

For sociologists, too, categorizing class is a fluid science. Sociologists generally identify three levels of class in the United States: upper, middle, and lower class. Within each class, there are many subcategories. Wealth is the most significant way of distinguishing classes, because wealth can be transferred to one's children, perpetuating the class structure. One economist, J.D. Foster, defines the 20 percent of America's highest earners as "upper income," and the lower 20 percent as "lower income." The remaining 60 percent of the population make up the middle class. But by that distinction, annual household incomes for the middle class range between \$25,000 and \$100,000 (Mason and Sullivan 2010). How can a person earning \$25,000 a year have the same standing as someone earning \$100,000 a year—four times as much?

One sociological perspective distinguishes the classes, in part, according to their relative power and control over their lives. The upper class not only have power and control over their own lives, their social status gives them power and control over others' lives as well. The middle class don't generally control other strata of society, but they do exert control over their own lives. In contrast, the lower class has little control over their work or lives. Below, we will explore the major divisions of American social class and their key subcategories.

Upper Class



Members of the upper class can afford to live, work, and play in exclusive places designed for luxury and comfort. (Photo courtesy of [PrimeImageMedia.com/flickr](https://www.primeimagemedia.com/flickr))

The upper class is considered America's top, and only the powerful elite get to see the view from there. In the United States, people with extreme wealth make up one percent of the population, and they own one-third of the country's wealth (Beeghley 2008).

Money provides not just access to material goods, but also access to power. America's upper class wields a lot of power. As corporate leaders, their decisions affect the job status of millions of people. As media owners, they shape the collective identity of the nation. They run the major network television stations, radio broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, and sports franchises. As board members of the most influential colleges and universities, they shape cultural attitudes and values. As philanthropists, they establish foundations to support social causes they believe in. As campaign contributors, they influence politicians and fund campaigns, sometimes to protect their own economic interests.

American society has historically distinguished between "old money" (inherited wealth passed from one generation to the next) and "new money" (wealth you have earned and built yourself). While both types may have

equal net worth, they have traditionally held different social standing. People of old money, firmly situated in the upper class for generations, have held high prestige. Their families have socialized them to know the customs, norms, and expectations that come with wealth. Often, the very wealthy don't work for wages. Some study business or become lawyers in order to manage the family fortune. Others, such as Paris Hilton, capitalize on being a rich socialite and transform that into celebrity status, flaunting a wealthy lifestyle.

However, new money members of the upper class are not oriented to the customs and mores of the elite. They haven't gone to the most exclusive schools. They have not established old-money social ties. People with new money might flaunt their wealth, buying sports cars and mansions, but they might still exhibit behaviors attributed to the middle and lower classes.

The Middle Class



These members of a club likely consider themselves middle class. (Photo courtesy of United Way Canada-Centraide Canada/flickr)

Many people call themselves middle class, but there are differing ideas about what that means. People with annual incomes of \$150,000 call themselves middle class, as do people who annually earn \$30,000. That helps explain why, in the United States, the middle class is broken into upper and lower subcategories.

Upper-middle-class people tend to hold bachelor's and postgraduate degrees. They've studied subjects such as business, management, law, or medicine. Lower-middle-class members hold bachelor's degrees or associate's degrees from two-year community or technical colleges.

Comfort is a key concept to the middle class. Middle-class people work hard and live fairly comfortable lives. Upper-middle-class people tend to pursue careers that earn comfortable incomes. They provide their families with large homes and nice cars. They may go skiing or boating on vacation. Their children receive quality education and health care (Gilbert 2010).

In the lower middle class, people hold jobs supervised by members of the upper middle class. They fill technical, lower-level management, or administrative support positions. Compared to lower-class work, lower-middle-class jobs carry more prestige and come with slightly higher paychecks. With these incomes, people can afford a decent, mainstream lifestyle, but they struggle to maintain it. They generally don't have enough income to build significant savings. In addition, their grip on class status is more precarious than in the upper tiers of the class system. When budgets are tight, lower-middle-class people are often the ones to lose their jobs.

The Lower Class



This man is a custodian at a restaurant. His job, which is crucial to the business, is considered lower class. (Photo courtesy of Frederick Md Publicity/flickr)

The lower class is also referred to as the working class. Just like the middle and upper classes, the lower class can be divided into subsets: the working class, the working poor, and the underclass. Compared to the lower middle class, lower-class people have less of an educational background and earn smaller incomes. They work jobs that require little prior skill or experience, often doing routine tasks under close supervision.

Working-class people, the highest subcategory of the lower class, often land decent jobs in fields like custodial or food service. The work is hands-on and often physically demanding, such as landscaping, cooking, cleaning, or building.

Beneath the working class is the working poor. Like the working class, they have unskilled, low-paying employment. However, their jobs rarely offer benefits such as healthcare or retirement planning, and their positions are often seasonal or temporary. They work as sharecroppers, migrant farm workers, housecleaners, and day laborers. Some are high school dropouts.

Some are illiterate, unable to read job ads. Many do not vote because they do not believe that any politician will help change their situation (Beeghley 2008).

How can people work full time and still be poor? Even working full time, millions of the working poor earn incomes too meager to support a family. Minimum wage varies from state to state, but in many states it is \$7.25 (Department of Labor 2011). At that rate, working 40 hours a week earns \$290. That comes to \$15,080 a year, before tax and deductions. Even for a single person, the pay is low. A married couple with children will have a hard time covering expenses.

The underclass is America's lowest tier. Members of the underclass live mainly in inner cities. Many are unemployed or underemployed. Those who do hold jobs typically perform menial tasks for little pay. Some of the underclass are homeless. For many, welfare systems provide a much-needed support through food assistance, medical care, housing, and the like.

Social Mobility

Social mobility refers to the ability to change positions within a social stratification system. When people improve or diminish their economic status in a way that affects social class, they experience social mobility.

Upward mobility refers to an increase—or upward shift—in social class. In the United States, people applaud the rags-to-riches achievements of celebrities like Jennifer Lopez or Michael Jordan. Bestselling author Stephen King worked as a janitor prior to being published. Oprah Winfrey grew up in poverty in rural Mississippi before becoming a powerful media personality. There are many stories of people rising from modest beginnings to fame and fortune. But the truth is that relative to the overall population, the number of people who launch from poverty to wealth is very small. Still, upward mobility is not only about becoming rich and famous. In the United States, people who earn a college degree, get a job promotion, or marry someone with a good income may move up socially.

Downward mobility indicates a lowering of one's social class. Some people move downward because of business setbacks, unemployment, or illness. Dropping out of school, losing a job, or becoming divorced may result in a loss of income or status and, therefore, downward social mobility.

Intergenerational mobility explains a difference in social class between different generations of a family. For example, an upper-class executive may have parents who belonged to the middle class. In turn, those parents may have been raised in the lower class. Patterns of intergenerational mobility can reflect long-term societal changes.

Intragenerational mobility describes a difference in social class that between different members of the same generation. For example, the wealth and prestige experienced by one person may be quite different from that of his or her siblings.

Structural mobility happens when societal changes enable a whole group of people to move up or down the social class ladder. Structural mobility is attributable to changes in society as a whole, not individual changes. In the first half of the 20th century, industrialization expanded the U.S. economy, raising the standard of living and leading to upward structural mobility. In today's work economy, the recession and the outsourcing of jobs overseas have contributed to high unemployment rates. Many people have experienced economic setbacks, creating a wave of downward structural mobility.

Many Americans believe that people move up in class because of individual efforts and move down by their own doing. In the example of the siblings Michael and Lisa, Lisa may have had more intelligence, drive, and ambition than her brother. She may have worked harder. However, Lisa's story can also be explained in the context of structural mobility. Lisa grew up during a time of expanding opportunities for women, opportunities that were not so readily available to her mother. She may have felt encouraged by her college mentors to pursue a higher degree, and she may have felt rewarded when she did so. If Michael and Lisa had grown up in an earlier era, their life paths may have been completely different.

When analyzing the trends and movements in social mobility, sociologists consider all modes of mobility. Scholars recognize that mobility is not as common or easy to achieve as many people think. In fact, some consider social mobility a myth.

Class Traits

Class traits, also called class markers, are the typical behaviors, customs, and norms that define each class. Class traits indicate the level of exposure a person has to a wide range of cultures. Class traits also indicate the amount of resources a person has to spend on items like hobbies, vacations, and leisure activities.

People may associate the upper class with enjoyment of costly, refined, or highly cultivated tastes—expensive clothing, luxury cars, high-end fundraisers, and opulent vacations. People may also believe that the middle and lower classes are more likely to enjoy camping, fishing, or hunting, shopping at large retailers, and participating in community activities. It is important to note that while these descriptions may be class traits, they may also simply be stereotypes. Moreover, just as class distinctions have blurred in recent decades, so too have class traits. A very wealthy person may enjoy bowling as much as opera. A factory worker could be a skilled French cook. A billionaire might dress in ripped jeans, and a low-income student might own designer shoes.

These days, individual taste does not necessarily follow class lines. Still, you are not likely to see someone driving a Mercedes living in an inner-city neighborhood. And most likely, a resident of a wealthy gated community will not be riding a bicycle to work. Class traits often develop based on cultural behaviors that stem from the resources available within each class.

Note:

Turn-of-the-Century “Social Problem Novels”: Sociological Gold Mines
Class distinctions were sharper in the 19th century and earlier, in part because people easily accepted them. The ideology of social order made

class structure seem natural, right, and just.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, American and British novelists played a role in changing public perception. They published novels in which characters struggled to survive against a merciless class system. These dissenting authors used gender and morality to question the class system and expose its inequalities. They protested the suffering of urbanization and industrialization, drawing attention to these issues. These “social problem novels,” sometimes called Victorian realism, forced middle-class readers into an uncomfortable position: they had to question and challenge the natural order of social class.

For speaking out so strongly about the social issues of class, authors were both praised and criticized. Most authors did not want to dissolve the class system. They wanted to bring about an awareness that would improve conditions for the lower classes, while maintaining their own higher class positions (DeVine 2005).

Soon, middle-class readers were not their only audience. In 1870, Forster’s Elementary Education Act required all children ages 5 through 12 in England and Wales to attend school. The act increased literacy levels among the urban poor, causing a rise in sales of cheap newspapers and magazines. Additionally, the increasing number of people who rode public transit systems created a demand for “railway literature,” as it was called (Williams 1984). These reading materials are credited with the move toward democratization in England. By 1900 the British middle class established a rigid definition for itself, and England’s working class also began to self-identify and demand a better way of life.

Many of the novels of that era are seen as sociological goldmines. They are studied as existing sources because they detail the customs and mores of the upper, middle, and lower classes of that period in history.

Examples of “social problem” novels include Charles Dickens’s *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* (1838), which shocked readers with its brutal portrayal of the realities of poverty, vice, and crime. Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) was considered revolutionary by critics for its depiction of working-class women (DeVine 2005), and American novelist Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900) portrayed an accurate and detailed description of early Chicago.

Summary

There are three main classes in the United States: upper, middle, and lower class. Social mobility describes a shift from one social class to another. Class traits, also called class markers, are the typical behaviors, customs, and norms that define each class.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: In the United States, most people define themselves as:

- a. middle class
- b. upper class
- c. lower class
- d. no specific class

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem: Structural mobility occurs when:

- a. an individual moves up the class ladder
- b. an individual moves down the class ladder
- c. a large group moves up or down the class ladder due to societal changes
- d. a member of a family belongs to a different class than his or her siblings

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

The behaviors, customs, and norms associated with a class are known as:

- a. class traits
- b. power
- c. prestige
- d. underclass

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following scenarios is an example of intergenerational mobility?

- a. A janitor belongs to the same social class as his grandmother did.
- b. An executive belongs to a different class than her parents.
- c. An editor shares the same social class as his cousin.
- d. A lawyer belongs to a different class than her sister.

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem: Occupational prestige means that jobs are:

- a. all equal in status
- b. not equally valued
- c. assigned to a person for life
- d. not part of a person's self-identity

Solution:

Answer

B

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Which social class do you and your family belong to? Are you in a different social class than your grandparents and great-grandparents? Does your class differ from your social standing, and, if so, how? What aspects of your societal situation establish you in a social class?

Exercise:

Problem:

What class traits define your peer group? For example, what speech patterns or clothing trends do you and your friends share? What cultural elements, such as taste in music or hobbies, define your peer group? How do you see this set of class traits as different from other classes either above or below yours?

Exercise:

Problem:

Write a list of 10–20 class traits that describe the environment of your upbringing. Which of these seem like true class traits, and which seem like stereotypes? What items might fall into both categories? How do you imagine a sociologist might address the conflation of class traits and stereotypes?

Further Research

PBS made a documentary about social class called “People Like Us: Social Class in America.” The filmmakers interviewed people who lived in Park Avenue penthouses and Appalachian trailer parks. The accompanying website is full of information, interactive games, and life stories from those who participated. Read about it at http://openstaxcollege.org/1/social_class_in_America

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Glossary

class traits

also called class markers, the typical behaviors, customs, and norms that define each class

downward mobility

a lowering of one's social class

intergenerational mobility

a difference in social class between different generations of a family

intragenerational mobility

a difference in social class between different members of the same generation

social mobility

the ability to change positions within a social stratification system

standard of living

the level of wealth available to acquire material goods and comforts to maintain a particular socioeconomic lifestyle

structural mobility

when societal changes enable a whole group of people to move up or down the class ladder

upward mobility

an increase—or upward shift—in social class

Global Stratification and Inequality

- Define global stratification
- Describe different sociological models for understanding global stratification
- Understand how studies of global stratification identify worldwide inequalities



A family lives in this grass hut in Ethiopia. Another family lives in a single-wide trailer in the trailer park in the United States. Both families are considered poor, or lower class. With such differences in global stratification, what constitutes poverty? (Photo (a) courtesy of Canned Muffins/flickr; Photo (b) courtesy of Herb Neufeld/flickr)

Global stratification compares the wealth, economic stability, status, and power of countries across the world. Global stratification highlights worldwide patterns of social inequality.

In the early years of civilization, hunter-gatherer and agrarian societies lived off the earth, rarely interacting with other societies. When explorers began traveling, societies began trading goods, as well as ideas and customs.

In the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution created unprecedented wealth in Western Europe and North America. Due to mechanical inventions and new means of production, people began working in factories—not only

men, but women and children as well. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, industrial technology had gradually raised the standard of living for many people in the United States and Europe.

The Industrial Revolution also saw the rise of vast inequalities between countries that were industrialized and those that were not. As some nations embraced technology and saw increased wealth and goods, others maintained their ways; as the gap widened, the nonindustrialized nations fell further behind. Some social researchers, such as Walt Rostow, suggest that the disparity also resulted from power differences. Applying a conflict theory perspective, he asserts that industrializing nations took advantage of the resources of traditional nations. As industrialized nations became rich, other nations became poor (Rostow 1960).

Sociologists studying global stratification analyze economic comparisons between nations. Income, purchasing power, and wealth are used to calculate global stratification. Global stratification also compares the quality of life that a country's population can have.

Poverty levels have been shown to vary greatly. The poor in wealthy countries like the United States or Europe are much better off than the poor in less-industrialized countries such as Mali or India. In 2002 the UN implemented the Millennium Project, an attempt to cut poverty worldwide by the year 2015. To reach the project's goal, planners in 2006 estimated that industrialized nations must set aside 0.7 percent of their gross national income—the total value of the nation's good and service, plus or minus income received from and sent to other nations—to aid in developing countries (Landler and Sanger, 2009; Millennium Project 2006).

Models of Global Stratification



Luxury vacation resorts can contribute to a poorer country's economy. This one, in Jamaica, attracts middle and upper-middle class people from wealthier nations. The resort is a source of income and provides jobs for local people. Just outside its borders, however, are poverty-stricken neighborhoods. (Photo courtesy of [gailf548/flickr](#))

Various models of global stratification all have one thing in common: they rank countries according to their relative economic status, or gross national product (GNP). Traditional models, now considered outdated, used labels to describe the stratification of the different areas of the world. Simply put, they were named "first world," "second world," and "third world." First and second world described industrialized nations, while third world referred to "undeveloped" countries (Henslin 2004). When researching existing historical sources, you may still encounter these terms, and even today people still refer to some nations as the "third world."

Another model separates countries into two groups: more developed and less developed. More developed nations have higher wealth, such as Canada, Japan, and Australia. Less developed nations have less wealth to distribute among higher populations, including many countries in central Africa, South America, and some island nations.

Yet another system of global classification defines countries based on the per capita gross domestic product (GDP), a country's average national wealth per person. The GDP is calculated (usually annually) one of two ways: by totaling either the income of all citizens or the value of all goods and services produced in the country during the year. It also includes government spending. Because the GDP indicates a country's productivity and performance, comparing GDP rates helps establish a country's economic health in relation to other countries.

The figures also establish a country's standard of living. According to this analysis, a GDP standard of a middle-income nation represents a global average. In low-income countries, most people are poor relative to people in other countries. Citizens have little access to amenities such as electricity, plumbing, and clean water. People in low-income countries are not guaranteed education, and many are illiterate. The life expectancy of citizens is lower than in high-income countries.

Note:

The Big Picture: Calculating Global Stratification

A few organizations take on the job of comparing the wealth of nations. The Population Reference Bureau (PRB) is one of them. Besides a focus on population data, the PRB publishes an annual report that measures the relative economic well-being of all the world's countries. It's called the GNI PPP.

GNI, or gross national income, measures the current value of goods and services produced by a country. PPP, or purchasing power parity, measures the relative power a country has to purchase those same goods and services. So, GNI refers to productive output and PPP refers to buying power. The total figure is divided by the number of residents living in a country to establish the average income of a resident of that country.

Because costs of goods and services vary from one country to the next, the GNI PPP converts figures into a relative international unit. Calculating GNI PPP figures helps researchers accurately compare countries' standard of living. They allow the United Nations and Population Reference Bureau to compare and rank the wealth of all countries and consider international stratification issues (nationsonline.org).

Summary

Global stratification compares the wealth, economic stability, status, and power of countries as a whole. By comparing income and productivity between nations, researchers can better identify global inequalities.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: Social stratification is a system that:

- a. ranks society members into categories
- b. destroys competition between society members
- c. allows society members to choose their social standing
- d. reflects personal choices of society members

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Which graphic concept best illustrates the concept of social stratification?

- a. Pie chart
 - b. Flag poles
 - c. Planetary movement
 - d. Pyramid
-

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem: The GNI PPP figure represents:

- a. a country's total accumulated wealth
 - b. annual government spending
 - c. the average annual income of a country's citizens
 - d. a country's debt
-

Solution:

Answer

C

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Why is it important to understand and be aware of global stratification? Make a list of specific issues that are related to global stratification. For inspiration, turn on a news channel or read the newspaper. Next, choose a topic from your list and look at it more closely. Who is affected by this issue? How is the issue specifically related to global stratification?

Exercise:

Problem:

Compare a family that lives in a grass hut in Ethiopia to an American family living in a trailer home in the United States. Assuming both exist at or below the poverty levels established by their country, how are the families' lifestyles and economic situations similar and how are they different?

Further Research

Nations Online refers to itself as “among other things, a more or less objective guide to the world, a statement for the peaceful, nonviolent coexistence of nations.” The website provides a variety of cultural, financial, historical, and ethnic information on countries and peoples throughout the world: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/Nations_Online.

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Glossary

global stratification

a comparison of the wealth, economic stability, status, and power of countries as a whole

Theoretical Perspectives on Social Stratification

- Understand and apply functionalist, conflict theory, and interactionist perspectives on social stratification

Basketball is one of the highest-paying professional sports. There is stratification even among teams. For example, the Minnesota Timberwolves hand out the lowest annual payroll, while the Los Angeles Lakers reportedly pay the highest. Kobe Bryant, a Lakers shooting guard, is one of the highest paid athletes in the NBA, earning around \$25 million a year (Basketballreference.com 2011). Even within specific fields, layers are stratified and members are ranked.

In sociology, even an issue such as NBA salaries can be seen from various points of view. Functionalists will examine the purpose of such high salaries, while conflict theorists will study the exorbitant salaries as an unfair distribution of money. Social stratification takes on new meanings when it is examined from different sociological perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism.

Functionalism

In sociology, the functionalist perspective examines how society's parts operate. According to functionalism, different aspects of society exist because they serve a needed purpose. What is the function of social stratification?

In 1945, sociologists Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore published the **Davis-Moore thesis**, which argued that the greater the functional importance of a social role, the greater must be the reward. The theory posits that social stratification represents the inherently unequal value of different work. Certain tasks in society are more valuable than others. Qualified people who fill those positions must be rewarded more than others.

According to Davis and Moore, a firefighter's job is more important than, for instance, a grocery store cashier's. The cashier position does not require

the same skill and training level as firefighting. Without the incentive of higher pay and better benefits, why would someone be willing to rush into burning buildings? If pay levels were the same, the firefighter might as well work as a grocery store cashier. Davis and Moore believed that rewarding more important work with higher levels of income, prestige, and power encourages people to work harder and longer.

Davis and Moore stated that, in most cases, the degree of skill required for a job determines that job's importance. They also stated that the more skill required for a job, the fewer qualified people there would be to do that job. Certain jobs, such as cleaning hallways or answering phones, do not require much skill. The employees don't need a college degree. Other work, like designing a highway system or delivering a baby, requires immense skill.

In 1953, Melvin Tumin countered the Davis-Moore thesis in "Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis." Tumin questioned what determined a job's degree of importance. The Davis-Moore thesis does not explain, he argued, why a media personality with little education, skill, or talent becomes famous and rich on a reality show or a campaign trail. The thesis also does not explain inequalities in the education system, or inequalities due to race or gender. Tumin believed social stratification prevented qualified people from attempting to fill roles (Tumin 1953). For example, an underprivileged youth has less chance of becoming a scientist, no matter how smart she is, because of the relative lack of opportunity available to her.

The Davis-Moore thesis, though open for debate, was an early attempt to explain why stratification exists. The thesis states that social stratification is necessary to promote excellence, productivity, and efficiency, thus giving people something to strive for. Davis and Moore believed that the system serves society as a whole because it allows everyone to benefit to a certain extent.

Conflict Theory



These people are protesting a decision made by Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee, to lay off custodians and outsource the jobs to a private firm to avoid paying employee benefits. Private job agencies often pay lower hourly wages. Is it fair? (Photo courtesy of Brian Stansberry/Wikimedia Commons)

Conflict theorists are deeply critical of social stratification, asserting that it benefits only some people, not all of society. For instance, to a conflict theorist, it seems wrong that a basketball player is paid millions for an annual contract while a public school teacher earns \$35,000 a year. Stratification, conflict theorists believe, perpetuates inequality. Conflict theorists try to bring awareness to inequalities, such as how a rich society can have so many poor members.

Many conflict theorists draw on the work of Karl Marx. During the 19th-century era of industrialization, Marx believed social stratification resulted from people's relationship to production. People were divided by a single line: they either owned factories or worked in them. In Marx's time, bourgeois capitalists owned high-producing businesses, factories, and land, as they still do today. Proletariats were the workers who performed the manual labor to produce goods. Upper-class capitalists raked in profits and

got rich, while working-class proletariats earned skimpy wages and struggled to survive. With such opposing interests, the two groups were divided by differences of wealth and power. Marx saw workers experience deep alienation, isolation and misery resulting from powerless status levels (Marx 1848).

Today, while working conditions have improved, conflict theorists believe that the strained working relationship between employers and employees still exists. Capitalists own the means of production, and a system is in place to make business owners rich and keep workers poor. According to conflict theorists, the resulting stratification creates class conflict.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theory that uses everyday interactions of individuals to explain society as a whole. Symbolic interactionism examines stratification from a micro-level perspective. This analysis strives to explain how people's social standing affects their everyday interactions.

In most communities, people interact primarily with others who share the same social standing. It is precisely because of social stratification that people tend to live, work, and associate with others like themselves, people who share their same income level, educational background, or racial background, and even tastes in food, music, and clothing. The built-in system of social stratification groups people together.

Symbolic interactionists also note that people's appearance reflects their perceived social standing. Housing, clothing, and transportation indicate social status, as do hairstyles, taste in accessories, and personal style.



(a) A group of construction workers on the job site, and (b) a group of businessmen. What categories of stratification do these construction workers share? How do construction workers differ from executives or custodians? Who is more skilled? Who has greater prestige in society? (Photo (a) courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of Chun Kit/flickr)

Conspicuous consumption refers to buying certain products to make a social statement about status. Carrying pricey but eco-friendly water bottles could indicate a person's social standing. Some people buy expensive trendy sneakers even though they will never wear them to jog or play sports. A \$17,000 car provides transportation as easily as a \$100,000 vehicle, but the luxury car makes a social statement that the less expensive car can't live up to. All of these symbols of stratification are worthy of examination by an interactionist.

Summary

Social stratification can be examined from different sociological perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. The functionalist perspective states that systems exist in society for good reasons. Conflict theorists observe that stratification promotes inequality,

such as between rich business owners and poor workers. Symbolic interactionists examine stratification from a micro-level perspective. They observe how social standing affects people's everyday interactions and how the concept of "social class" is constructed and maintained through everyday interactions.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

The basic premise of the Davis-Moore thesis is that the unequal distribution of rewards in social stratification:

- a. is an outdated mode of societal organization
- b. is an artificial reflection of society
- c. serves a purpose in society
- d. cannot be justified

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

Unlike Davis and Moore, Melvin Tumin believed that, because of social stratification, some qualified people were _____ higher-level job positions.

- a. denied the opportunity to obtain
 - b. encouraged to train for
 - c. often fired from
 - d. forced into
-

Solution:
Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Which statement represents stratification from the perspective of symbolic interactionism?

- a. Men often earn more than women, even working the same job.
- b. After work, Pat, a janitor, feels more comfortable eating in a truck stop than a French restaurant.
- c. Doctors earn more money because their job is more highly valued.
- d. Teachers continue to struggle to keep benefits such as health insurance.

Solution:
Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

When Karl Marx said workers experience alienation, he meant that workers:

- a. must labor alone, without companionship
- b. do not feel connected to their work
- c. move from one geographical location to another
- d. have to put forth self-effort to get ahead

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem: Conflict theorists view capitalists as those who:

- a. are ambitious
- b. fund social services
- c. spend money wisely
- d. get rich while workers stay poor

Solution:

Answer

D

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Analyze the Davis-Moore thesis. Do you agree with Davis and Moore? Does social stratification play an important function in society? What examples can you think of that support the thesis? What examples can you think of that refute the thesis?

Exercise:

Problem:

Consider social stratification from the symbolic interactionist perspective. How does social stratification influence the daily interactions of individuals? How do systems of class, based on factors such as prestige, power, income, and wealth, influence your own daily routines, as well as your beliefs and attitudes? Illustrate your ideas with specific examples and anecdotes from your own life and the lives of people in your community.

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Glossary

conspicuous consumption

buying and using products to make a statement about social standing

Davis-Moore thesis

thesis that argues some social stratification is a social necessity

Introduction to Gender, Sex, and Sexuality class="introduction"

Some children
may learn at an
early age that their
gender does not
correspond with
their sex. (Photo
courtesy of
trazomfreak/flickr
)



When Harry was born, his parents, Steve and Barb, were delighted to add another boy to their family. But as their baby boy began to grow and develop, they noticed that Harry began to express himself in a manner that they viewed as more feminine than masculine. He gravitated toward dolls and other toys that our culture typically associates with girls. But Harry's preference was not simply about liking pink more than blue or flowers more than fire trucks. He even began to draw himself as a girl, complete with a dress and high-heeled shoes. In fact, Harry did not just wish to be a girl; he believed he *was* a girl.

In kindergarten, Harry often got into arguments with male classmates because he insisted that he was a girl, not a boy. He even started calling

himself “Hailey.” Steve and Barb met with several psychologists, all of whom told them that Hailey was transgendered. But Steve and Barb had a hard time understanding that their five-year-old son could have already developed a gender identity that went against society’s expectations. Concerned with the social ramifications associated with his child being transgendered, Steve hoped this was just a phase. But Barb, and eventually Steve, realized that Harry’s feelings were genuine and unyielding, and they made the decision to let Harry live as Hailey—a girl. They came to this decision after concluding that the criticism he would endure from his peers and other members of society would be less damaging than the confusion he might experience internally if he were forced to live as a boy.

Many transgendered children grow up hating their bodies, and this population can have high rates of drug abuse and suicide (Weiss 2011). Fearful of these outcomes and eager to make their child happy, Steven and Barb now refer to Harry as Hailey and allow *her* to dress and behave in manners that are considered feminine. To a stranger, Hailey is likely to appear just like any other girl and may even be considered *extra girly* due to her love of all things pink. But to those who once knew Hailey as Harry, Hailey is likely to endure more ridicule and rejection as the result of adopting a feminine gender identity.

Currently, seven-year-old Hailey and her parents are comfortable with her gender status, but Steve and Barb are concerned about what questions and problems might arise as she gets older. “Who’s going to love my child?” asks Steve (Ling 2011). This question isn’t asked because Hailey is unlovable, but because American society has yet to fully listen to or understand the personal narratives of the transgendered population (Hanes and Sanger 2010).

In this chapter, we will discuss the differences between sex and gender, along with issues like gender identity and sexuality. We will also explore various theoretical perspectives on the subjects of gender and sexuality.

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The Difference Between Sex and Gender

- Define and differentiate between sex and gender
- Define and discuss what is meant by gender identity
- Understand and discuss the role of homophobia and heterosexism in society
- Distinguish the meanings of transgender, transsexual, and homosexual identities



While the biological differences between males and females are fairly straightforward, the social and cultural aspects of being a man or woman can be complicated. (Photo courtesy of FaceMePLS/flickr)

When filling out a document such as a job application or school registration form you are often asked to provide your name, address, phone number, birth date, and sex or gender. But have you ever been asked to provide your sex *and* your gender? As with most people, it may not have occurred to you that sex and gender are not the same. However, sociologists and most other social scientists view sex and gender as conceptually distinct. **Sex** refers to physical or physiological differences between males and females, including both primary sex characteristics (the reproductive system) and secondary

characteristics such as height and muscularity. **Gender** is a term that refers to social or cultural distinctions associated with being male or female. **Gender identity** is the extent to which one identifies as being either masculine or feminine (Diamond 2002).

A person's sex, as determined by his or her biology, does not always correspond with his or her gender. Therefore, the terms *sex* and *gender* are not interchangeable. A baby boy who is born with male genitalia will be identified as male. As he grows, however, he may identify with the feminine aspects of his culture. Since the term *sex* refers to biological or physical distinctions, characteristics of sex will not vary significantly between different human societies. For example, all persons of the female sex, in general, regardless of culture, will eventually menstruate and develop breasts that can lactate. Characteristics of gender, on the other hand, may vary greatly between different societies. For example, in American culture, it is considered feminine (or a trait of the female gender) to wear a dress or skirt. However, in many Middle Eastern, Asian, and African cultures, dresses or skirts (often referred to as sarongs, robes, or gowns) can be considered masculine. The kilt worn by a Scottish male does not make him appear feminine in his culture.

The dichotomous view of gender (the notion that one is either male or female) is specific to certain cultures and is not universal. In some cultures gender is viewed as fluid. In the past, some anthropologists used the term *berdache* to refer to individuals who occasionally or permanently dressed and lived as the opposite gender. The practice has been noted among certain Native American tribes (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997). Samoan culture accepts what they refer to as a "third gender." *Fa'afafine*, which translates as "the way of the woman," is a term used to describe individuals who are born biologically male but embody both masculine and feminine traits. Fa'afafines are considered an important part of Samoan culture. Individuals from other cultures may mislabel them as homosexuals because fa'afafines have a varied sexual life that may include men or women (Poasa 1992).

Note:

The Legalese of Sex and Gender

The terms *sex* and *gender* have not always been differentiated in the English language. It was not until the 1950s that American and British psychologists and other professionals working with intersex and transsexual patients formally began distinguishing between sex and gender. Since then, psychological and physiological professionals have increasingly used the term *gender* (Moi 2005). By the end of the 21st century, expanding the proper usage of the term *gender* to everyday language became more challenging—particularly where legal language is concerned. In an effort to clarify usage of the terms *sex* and *gender*, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia wrote in a 1994 briefing, “The word *gender* has acquired the new and useful connotation of cultural or attitudinal characteristics (as opposed to physical characteristics) distinctive to the sexes. That is to say, *gender* is to *sex* as *feminine* is to *female* and *masculine* is to *male*” (*J.E.B. v. Alabama*, 144 S. Ct. 1436 [1994]). Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg had a different take, however. Viewing the words as synonymous, she freely swapped them in her briefings so as to avoid having the word “*sex*” pop up too often. It is thought that her secretary supported this practice by suggestions to Ginsburg that “those nine men” (the other Supreme Court justices), “hear that word and their first association is not the way you want them to be thinking” (Case 1995). This anecdote reveals that even human experience that is assumed to be biological and personal (such as our self-perception and behavior) is actually a socially defined variable by culture.

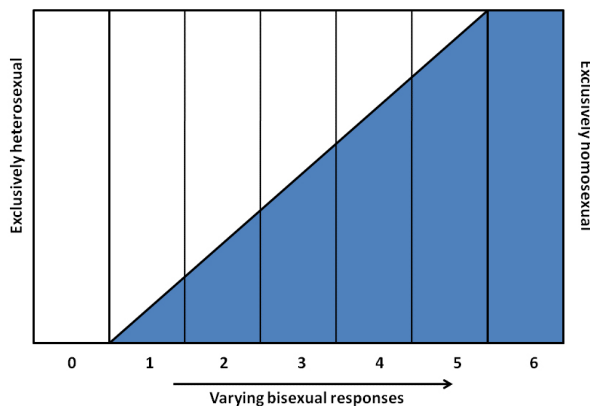
Sexual Orientation

A person’s **sexual orientation** is their emotional and sexual attraction to a particular sex (male or female). Sexual orientation is typically divided into four categories: *heterosexuality*, the attraction to individuals of the opposite sex; *homosexuality*, the attraction to individuals of one’s own sex; *bisexuality*, the attraction to individuals of either sex; and *asexuality*, no attraction to either sex. Heterosexuals and homosexuals may also be referred to informally as “straight” and “gay,” respectively. The United States is a heteronormative society, meaning it supports heterosexuality as the norm. Consider that homosexuals are often asked, “When did you know

you were gay?” but heterosexuals are rarely asked, “When did you know that you were straight?” (Ryle 2011).

According to current scientific understanding, individuals are usually aware of their sexual orientation between middle childhood and early adolescence (American Psychological Association 2008). They do not have to participate in sexual activity to be aware of these emotional, romantic, and physical attractions; people can be celibate and still recognize their sexual orientation. Homosexual women (also referred to as lesbians), homosexual men (also referred to as gays), and bisexuals of both genders may have very different experiences of discovering and accepting their sexual orientation. At the point of puberty, some may be able to claim their sexual orientations while others may be unready or unwilling to make their homosexuality or bisexuality known since it goes against American society’s historical norms (APA 2008).

Alfred Kinsey was among the first to conceptualize sexuality as a continuum rather than a strict dichotomy of gay or straight. To classify this continuum of heterosexuality and homosexuality, Kinsey created a six-point rating scale that ranges from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual (see the figure below). In his 1948 work *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Kinsey writes, “Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats ... The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects” (Kinsey 1948).



The Kinsey scale indicates that sexuality can be measured by more than just heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Later scholarship by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick expanded on Kinsey's notions. She coined the term "homosocial" to oppose "homosexual," describing non-sexual same-sex relations. Sedgwick recognized that in American culture, males are subject to a clear divide between the two sides of this continuum, whereas females enjoy more fluidity. This can be illustrated by the way women in America can express homosocial feelings (nonsexual regard for people of the same sex) through hugging, handholding, and physical closeness. In contrast, American males refrain from these expressions since they violate the heteronormative expectation. While women experience a flexible norming of variations of behavior that spans the heterosocial-homosocial spectrum, male behavior is subject to strong social sanction if it veers into homosocial territory because of societal homophobia (Sedgwick 1985).

There is no scientific consensus regarding the exact reasons why an individual holds a heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual orientation. There has been research conducted to study the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, but there has been no evidence that links sexual orientation to one factor (APA 2008). Research, however, does present evidence showing that homosexuals and bisexuals are treated differently than heterosexuals in schools, the workplace, and the military. It is reported that in the workplace, for example, discrimination based on sexual orientation occurs at a rate of 4 per 10,000, which is higher than the rate of discrimination based on race, which stands at 3.90 (Sears and Mallory 2007.)

Much of this discrimination is based on stereotypes, misinformation, and **homophobia**, an extreme or irrational aversion to homosexuals. Major policies to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation have not come into effect until the last few years. In 2011, President Obama

overturned “don’t ask, don’t tell,” a controversial policy that required homosexuals in the US military to keep their sexuality undisclosed. Between 2004 and 2010, five states and the District of Columbia legalized gay marriage. The Employee Non-Discrimination Act, which ensures workplace equality regardless of sexual orientation, is still pending full government approval. Organizations such as GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) advocate for homosexual rights and encourage governments and citizens to recognize the presence of sexual discrimination and work to prevent it. Other advocacy agencies frequently use the acronyms LBGT and LBGQT, which stands for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender” (and “Queer” or “Questioning” when the Q is added).

Gender Roles

As we grow, we learn how to behave from those around us. In this socialization process, children are introduced to certain roles that are typically linked to their biological sex. The term **gender role** refers to society’s concept of how men and women are expected to act and how they should behave. These roles are based on norms, or standards, created by society. In American culture, masculine roles are usually associated with strength, aggression, and dominance, while feminine roles are usually associated with passivity, nurturing, and subordination. Role learning starts with socialization at birth. Even today, our society is quick to outfit male infants in blue and girls in pink, even applying these color-coded gender labels while a baby is in the womb.

One way children learn gender roles is through play. Parents typically supply boys with trucks, toy guns, and superhero paraphernalia, which are active toys that promote motor skills, aggression, and solitary play. Daughters are often given dolls and dress-up apparel that foster nurturing, social proximity, and role play. Studies have shown that children will most likely choose to play with “gender appropriate” toys (or same-gender toys) even when cross-gender toys are available because parents give children positive feedback (in the form of praise, involvement, and physical closeness) for gender normative behavior (Caldera, Huston, and O’Brien 1998).



Fathers tend to be more involved when their sons engage in gender appropriate activities such as sports. (Photo courtesy of stephanski/flickr)

The drive to adhere to masculine and feminine gender roles continues later in life. Men tend to outnumber women in professions such as law enforcement, the military, and politics. Women tend to outnumber men in care-related occupations such as childcare, healthcare, and social work. These occupational roles are examples of typical American male and female behavior, derived from our culture's traditions. Adherence to them demonstrates fulfillment of social expectations but not necessarily personal preference (Diamond 2002).

Gender Identity

American society allows for some level of flexibility when it comes to acting out gender roles. To a certain extent, men can assume some feminine roles and women can assume some masculine roles without interfering with their gender identity. **Gender identity** is an individual's self-conception of being male or female based on his or her association with masculine or feminine gender roles.

Individuals who identify with the role that is the opposite of their biological sex are called **transgender**. Transgendered males, for example, have such a strong emotional and psychological connection to the feminine aspects of society that they identify their gender as female. The parallel connection to masculinity exists for transgendered females. It is difficult to determine the prevalence of transgenderism in society. However, it is estimated that two to five percent of the US population is transgendered (Transgender Law and Policy Institute 2007).

Transgendered individuals who wish to alter their bodies through medical interventions such as surgery and hormonal therapy—so that their physical being is better aligned with gender identity—are called **transsexuals**. They may also be known as male-to-female (MTF) or female-to-male (FTM). Not all transgendered individuals choose to alter their bodies: many will maintain their original anatomy but may present themselves to society as the opposite gender. This is typically done by adopting the dress, hairstyle, mannerisms, or other characteristic typically assigned to the opposite gender. It is important to note that people who cross-dress, or wear clothing that is traditionally assigned to opposite gender, are not necessarily transgendered. Cross-dressing is typically a form of self-expression, entertainment, or personal style, not necessarily an expression against one's assigned gender (APA 2008).

There is no single, conclusive explanation for why people are transgendered. Transgendered expressions and experiences are so diverse that it is difficult to identify their origin. Some hypotheses suggest biological factors such as genetics or prenatal hormone levels as well as social and cultural factors such as childhood and adulthood experiences. Most experts believe that all of these factors contribute to a person's gender identity (APA 2008).

It is known, however, that transgendered and transsexual individuals experience discrimination based on their gender identity. People who identify as transgendered are twice as likely to experience assault or discrimination as non-transgendered individuals; they are also one and a half times more likely to experience intimidation (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs 2010). Organizations such as the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs and Global Action for Trans Equality work to prevent, respond to, and end all types of violence against transgender, transsexual, and homosexual individuals. These organizations hope that by educating the public about gender identity and empowering transgender and transsexual individuals, this violence will end.

Note:

Real-Life Freaky Friday

What if you had to live as the opposite sex? If you are a man, imagine that you were forced to wear frilly dresses, dainty shoes, and makeup to special occasions, and you were expected to enjoy romantic comedies and TLC reality shows. If you are a woman, imagine that you were forced to wear shapeless clothing, put only minimal effort into your personal appearance, not show emotion, and watch countless hours of sporting events and sports-related commentary. It would be pretty uncomfortable, right? Well, maybe not. Many people enjoy participating in activities that are typically associated with the opposite sex and would not mind if some of the cultural expectations for men and women were loosened.

Now, imagine that when you look at your body in the mirror, you feel disconnected. You feel your genitals are shameful and dirty, and you feel as though you are trapped in someone else's body with no chance of escape. As you get older, you hate the way your body is changing, and, therefore, you hate yourself. These elements of disconnect and shame are important to understand when discussing transgendered individuals. Fortunately, sociological studies pave the way for a deeper and more empirically grounded understanding of transgendered experience.



Chaz Bono is the transgendered son of Cher and Sonny Bono. Being transgendered is not about clothing or hairstyles; it is about self-perception. (Photo courtesy of Greg Hernandez/flickr)

Summary

The terms “sex” and “gender” refer to two different identifiers. Sex denotes biological characteristics differentiating males and females, while gender denotes social and cultural characteristics of masculine and feminine behavior. Sex and gender are not always synchronous. Individuals who strongly identify with the opposing gender are considered transgendered.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

The terms “masculine” and “feminine” refer to a person’s _____.

- a. sex
- b. gender
- c. both sex and gender
- d. none of the above

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

_____ is/are an individual’s self-conception of being male or female based on his or her association with masculine or feminine gender roles.

- a. Gender identity
- b. Gender bias
- c. Sexual orientation
- d. Sexual attitudes

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Research indicates that individuals are aware of their sexual orientation _____.

- a. at infancy
- b. in early adolescence
- c. in early adulthood
- d. in late adulthood

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

A person who is biologically female but identifies with the male gender and has undergone surgery to alter her body is considered _____.

- a. transgendered
- b. transsexual
- c. a cross-dresser
- d. homosexual

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of following is correct regarding the explanation for transgenderism?

- a. It is strictly biological and associated with chemical imbalances in the brain.
- b. It is a behavior that is learned through socializing with other transgendered individuals.
- c. It is genetic and usually skips one generation.
- d. Currently, there is no definitive explanation for transgenderism.

Solution:**Answer**

D

Short Answer**Exercise:****Problem:**

Why do sociologists find it important to differentiate between sex and gender? What importance does the differentiation have in modern society?

Exercise:**Problem:**

How is children's play influenced by gender roles? Think back to your childhood. How "gendered" were the toys and activities available to you? Do you remember gender expectations being conveyed through the approval or disapproval of your playtime choices?

Further Research

For more information on gender identity and advocacy for transgendered individuals see the Global Action for Trans Equality web site at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/trans_equality.

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Glossary

gender identity

an individual's sense of being either masculine or feminine

gender role

society's concept of how men and women should behave

gender

a term that refers to social or cultural distinctions of behaviors that are considered male or female

homophobia

an extreme or irrational aversion to homosexuals

sex

a term that denotes the presence of physical or physiological differences between males and females

sexual orientation

a person's emotional and sexual attraction to a particular sex (male or female)

transgender

a term that refers to individuals who identify with the behaviors and characteristics that are opposite of their biological sex

transsexuals

transgendered individuals who wish to alter their bodies through medical interventions such as surgery and hormonal therapy

Gender

- Explain the influence of socialization on gender roles in the United States
- Understand the stratification of gender in major American institutions
- Describe gender from the view of each sociological perspective



Traditional images of American gender roles reinforce the idea that women should be subordinate to men. (Photo courtesy of Sport Suburban/flickr)

Gender and Socialization

The phrase “boys will be boys” is often used to justify behavior such as pushing, shoving, or other forms of aggression from young boys. The phrase implies that such behavior is unchangeable and something that is part of a boy’s nature. Aggressive behavior, when it does not inflict

significant harm, is often accepted from boys and men because it is congruent with the cultural script for masculinity. The “script” written by society is in some ways similar to a script written by a playwright. Just as a playwright expects actors to adhere to a prescribed script, society expects women and men to behave according to the expectations of their respective gender role. Scripts are generally learned through a process known as socialization, which teaches people to behave according to social norms.

Socialization

Children learn at a young age that there are distinct expectations for boys and girls. Cross-cultural studies reveal that children are aware of gender roles by age two or three. At four or five, most children are firmly entrenched in culturally appropriate gender roles (Kane 1996). Children acquire these roles through socialization, a process in which people learn to behave in a particular way as dictated by societal values, beliefs, and attitudes. For example, society often views riding a motorcycle as a masculine activity and, therefore, considers it to be part of the male gender role. Attitudes such as this are typically based on stereotypes, oversimplified notions about members of a group. Gender stereotyping involves overgeneralizing about the attitudes, traits, or behavior patterns of women or men. For example, women may be thought of as too timid or weak to ride a motorcycle.



Although our society may have a stereotype that associates motorcycles with men, female bikers demonstrate that a woman's place extends far beyond the kitchen in modern America. (Photo courtesy of Robert Couse-Baker/flickr)

Gender stereotypes form the basis of sexism. **Sexism** refers to prejudiced beliefs that value one sex over another. Sexism varies in its level of severity. In parts of the world where women are strongly undervalued, young girls may not be given the same access to nutrition, healthcare, and education as boys. Further, they will grow up believing that they deserve to be treated differently from boys (UNICEF 2011; Thorne 1993). While illegal in the United States when practiced as discrimination, unequal treatment of women continues to pervade social life. It should be noted that discrimination based on sex occurs at both the micro- and macro-levels. Many sociologists focus on discrimination that is built into the social structure; this type of discrimination is known as institutional discrimination (Pincus 2008).

Gender socialization occurs through four major agents of socialization: family, education, peer groups, and mass media. Each agent reinforces gender roles by creating and maintaining normative expectations for gender-specific behavior. Exposure also occurs through secondary agents such as religion and the workplace. Repeated exposure to these agents over time leads men and women into a false sense that they are acting naturally rather than following a socially constructed role.

Family is the first agent of socialization. There is considerable evidence that parents socialize sons and daughters differently. Generally speaking, girls are given more latitude to step outside of their prescribed gender role

(Coltrane and Adams 2004; Kimmel 2000; Raffaelli and Ontai 2004). However, differential socialization typically results in greater privileges afforded to sons. For instance, boys are allowed more autonomy and independence at an earlier age than daughters. They may be given fewer restrictions on appropriate clothing, dating habits, or curfew. Sons are also often free from performing domestic duties such as cleaning or cooking and other household tasks that are considered feminine. Daughters are limited by their expectation to be passive and nurturing, generally obedient, and to assume many of the domestic responsibilities.

Even when parents set gender equality as a goal, there may be underlying indications of inequality. For example, when dividing up household chores, boys may be asked to take out the garbage or perform other tasks that require strength or toughness, while girls may be asked to fold laundry or perform duties that require neatness and care. It has been found that fathers are firmer in their expectations for gender conformity than are mothers, and their expectations are stronger for sons than they are for daughters (Kimmel 2000). This is true in many types of activities, including preference of toys, play styles, discipline, chores, and personal achievements. As a result, boys tend to be particularly attuned to their father's disapproval when engaging in an activity that might be considered feminine, like dancing or singing (Coltrane and Adams 2008). It should be noted that parental socialization and normative expectations vary along lines of social class, race, and ethnicity. African-American families, for instance, are more likely than Caucasians to model an egalitarian role structure for their children (Staples and Boulin Johnson 2004).

The reinforcement of gender roles and stereotypes continues once a child reaches school age. Until very recently, schools were rather explicit in their efforts to stratify boys and girls. The first step toward stratification was segregation. Girls were encouraged to take home economics or humanities courses and boys to take math and science courses.

Studies suggest that gender socialization still occurs in schools today, perhaps in less obvious forms (Lips 2004). Teachers may not even realize that they are acting in ways that reproduce gender differentiated behavior patterns. Yet, any time they ask students to arrange their seats or line up

according to gender, teachers are asserting that boys and girls should be treated differently (Thorne 1993).

Even in levels as low as kindergarten, schools subtly convey messages to girls indicating that they are less intelligent or less important than boys. For example, in a study involving teacher responses to male and female students, data indicated that teachers praised male students far more than their female counterparts. Additionally, teachers interrupted girls more and gave boys more opportunities to expand on their ideas (Sadker and Sadker 1994). Further, in social as well as academic situations, teachers have traditionally positioned boys and girls oppositionally—reinforcing a sense of competition rather than collaboration (Thorne 1993). Boys are also permitted a greater degree of freedom regarding rule-breaking or minor acts of deviance, whereas girls are expected to follow rules carefully and to adopt an obedient posture (Ready 2001). Schools reinforce the polarization of gender roles and the age-old “battle of the sexes” by positioning girls and boys in competitive arrangements.

Mimicking the actions of significant others is the first step in the development of a separate sense of self (Mead 1934). Like adults, children become agents who actively facilitate and apply normative gender expectations to those around them. When children do not conform to the appropriate gender role, they may face negative sanctions such as being criticized or marginalized by their peers. Though many of these sanctions are informal, they can be quite severe. For example, a girl who wishes to take karate class instead of dance lessons may be called a “tomboy” and face difficulty gaining acceptance from both male and female peer groups (Ready 2001). Boys, especially, are subject to intense ridicule for gender nonconformity (Coltrane and Adams 2004; Kimmel 2000).

Mass media serves as another significant agent of gender socialization. In television and movies, women tend to have less significant roles and are often portrayed as wives or mothers. When women are given a lead role, they are often one of two extremes: a wholesome, saint-like figure or a malevolent, hypersexual figure (Etaugh and Bridges 2003). This same inequality is pervasive in children’s movies (Smith 2008). Research indicates that of the 101 top-grossing G-rated movies released between

1990 and 2005, three out of four characters were male. Out of those 101 movies, only seven were near being gender balanced, with a character ratio of less than 1.5 males per 1 female (Smith 2008).

Television commercials and other forms of advertising also reinforce inequality and gender-based stereotypes. Women are almost exclusively present in ads promoting cooking, cleaning, or childcare-related products (Davis 1993). Think about the last time you saw a man star in a dishwasher or laundry detergent commercial. In general, women are underrepresented in roles that involve leadership, intelligence, or a balanced psyche. Of particular concern is the depiction of women in ways that are dehumanizing, especially in music videos. Even in mainstream advertising, however, themes intermingling violence and sexuality are quite common (Kilbourne 2000).

Social Stratification and Inequality

Stratification refers to a system in which groups of people experience unequal access to basic, yet highly valuable, social resources. The United States is characterized by gender stratification (as well as stratification of race, income, occupation, and the like). Evidence of gender stratification is especially keen within the economic realm. Despite making up nearly half (49.8 percent) of payroll employment, men vastly outnumber women in authoritative, powerful, and, therefore, high-earning jobs (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Even when a woman's employment status is equal to a man's, she will generally only make 77 cents for every dollar made by her male counterpart (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Additionally, women who are in the paid labor force still do the majority of the unpaid work at home. On an average day, 84 percent of women (compared to 67 percent of men) spend time doing household management activities (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). This double duty keeps working women in a subordinate role in the family structure (Hochschild and Machung 1989).

Gender stratification through the division of labor is not exclusively American. According to George Murdock's classic work, *Outline of World Cultures* (1954), all societies classify work by gender. When a pattern

appears in all societies, it is called a cultural universal. While the phenomenon of assigning work by gender is universal, its specifics are not. The same task is not assigned to either men or women worldwide. But the way each task's associated gender is valued is notable. In Murdock's examination of the division of labor among 324 societies around the world, he found that in nearly all cases the jobs assigned to men were given greater prestige (Murdock and White 1968). Even if the job types were very similar and the differences slight, men's work was still considered more vital.

There is a long history of gender stratification in the United States. When looking to the past, it would appear that society has made great strides in terms of abolishing some of the most blatant forms of gender inequality (see timeline below) but underlying effects of male dominance still permeate many aspects of society.

- Before 1809—Women could not execute a will
- Before 1840—Women were not allowed to own or control property
- Before 1920—Women were not permitted to vote
- Before 1963—Employers could legally pay a woman less than a man for the same work
- Before 1973—Women did not have the right to a safe and legal abortion (Imbornoni 2009)



In some cultures, women do all of the household chores with no help from men, as doing

housework is a sign of weakness, considered by society as a feminine trait. (Photo courtesy of Evil Erin/flickr)

Theoretical Perspectives on Gender

Sociological theories serve to guide the research process and offer a means for interpreting research data and explaining social phenomena. For example, a sociologist interested in gender stratification in education may study why middle-school girls are more likely than their male counterparts to fall behind grade-level expectations in math and science. Another scholar might investigate why women are underrepresented in political office, while another might examine how congresswomen are treated by their male counterparts in meetings.

Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalism has provided one of the most important perspectives of sociological research in the twentieth century and has been a major influence on research in the social sciences, including gender studies. Viewing the family as the most integral component of society, assumptions about gender roles within marriage assume a prominent place in this perspective.

Functionalists argue that gender roles were established well before the pre-industrial era when men typically took care of responsibilities outside of the home, such as hunting, and women typically took care of the domestic responsibilities in or around the home. These roles were considered functional because women were often limited by the physical restraints of pregnancy and nursing and unable to leave the home for long periods of time. Once established, these roles were passed on to subsequent

generations since they served as an effective means of keeping the family system functioning properly.

When changes occurred in the social and economic climate of the United States during World War II, changes in the family structure also occurred. Many women had to assume the role of breadwinner (or modern hunter and gatherer) alongside their domestic role in order to stabilize a rapidly changing society. When the men returned from war and wanted to reclaim their jobs, society fell back into a state of imbalance, as many women did not want to forfeit their wage-earning positions (Hawke 2007).

Conflict Theory

According to conflict theory, society is a struggle for dominance among social groups (like women versus men) that compete for scarce resources. When sociologists examine gender from this perspective, we can view men as the dominant group and women as the subordinate group. According to conflict theory, social problems are created when dominant groups exploit or oppress subordinate groups. Consider the Women's Suffrage Movement or the debate over women's "right to choose" their reproductive futures. It is difficult for women to rise above men, as dominant group members create the rules for success and opportunity in society (Farrington and Chertok 1993).

Friedrich Engels, a German sociologist, studied family structure and gender roles. Engels suggested that the same owner-worker relationship seen in the labor force is also seen in the household, with women assuming the role of the proletariat. This is due to women's dependence on men for the attainment of wages, which is even worse for women who are entirely dependent upon their spouses for economic support. Contemporary conflict theorists suggest that when women become wage earners, they can gain power in the family structure and create more democratic arrangements in the home, although they may still carry the majority of the domestic burden, as noted earlier (Risman and Johnson-Sumerford 1998).

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is a type of conflict theory that examines inequalities in gender-related issues. It uses the conflict approach to examine the maintenance of gender roles and inequalities. Radical feminism, in particular, considers the role of the family in perpetuating male dominance. In patriarchal societies, men's contributions are seen as more valuable than those of women. Additionally, women often perceive a disconnect between their personal experiences and the experiences upheld by society as a whole. Patriarchal perspectives and arrangements are widespread and taken for granted. As a result, women's viewpoints tend to be silenced or marginalized to the point of being discredited or considered invalid.

Sanday's study of the Indonesian Minangkabau (2004) revealed that in societies that some consider to be matriarchies (where women comprise the dominant group), women and men tend to work cooperatively rather than competitively regardless of whether a job is considered feminine by American standards. The men, however, do not experience the sense of bifurcated consciousness under this social structure that modern U.S. females encounter (Sanday 2004).

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism aims to understand human behavior by analyzing the critical role of symbols in human interaction. This is certainly relevant to the discussion of masculinity and femininity. Imagine that you walk into a bank, hoping to get a small loan for school, a home, or a small business venture. If you meet with a male loan officer, you may state your case logically by listing all of the hard numbers that make you a qualified applicant as a means of appealing to the analytical characteristics associated with masculinity. If you meet with a female loan officer, you may make an emotional appeal by stating your good intentions as a means of appealing to the caring characteristics associated with femininity.

Because the meanings attached to symbols are socially created and not natural, and fluid, not static, we act and react to symbols based on the

current assigned meaning. The word *gay*, for example, once meant “cheerful,” but by the 1960s it carried the primary meaning of “homosexual.” In transition, it was even known to mean “careless” or “bright and showing” (Oxford American Dictionary 2010). Furthermore, the word *gay* (as it refers to a homosexual), carried a somewhat negative and unfavorable meaning 50 years ago, but has since gained more neutral and even positive connotations.

These shifts in symbolic meaning apply to family structure as well. A half-century ago, when only 20 percent of married women with preschool-aged children were part of the paid workforce, a working mother was considered an anomaly and there was a general view that women who worked were “selfish” and not good mothers. Today, when a majority of women with preschool-aged children are part of the paid workforce (60 percent), a working mother is viewed as more normal (Coltrane and Adams 2008).

Sociologist Charles H. Cooley’s concept of the “looking-glass self” (1902) can also be applied to interactionist gender studies. Cooley suggests that one’s determination of self is based mainly on the view of society (for instance, if society perceives a man as masculine, then that man will perceive himself as masculine). When people perform tasks or possess characteristics based on the gender role assigned to them, they are said to be **doing gender**. This notion is based on the work of West & Zimmerman (1987). Whether we are expressing our masculinity or femininity, West and Zimmerman argue, we are *always* “doing gender.” Thus, gender is something we *do* or perform, not something we *are*.

Note:

Being Male, Being Female, and Being Healthy

In 1971, Broverman and Broverman conducted a groundbreaking study on the traits mental health workers ascribed to males and females. When asked to name the characteristics of a female, the list featured words such as unaggressive, gentle, emotional, tactful, less logical, not ambitious, dependent, passive, and neat. The list of male characteristics featured words such as aggressive, rough, unemotional, blunt, logical, direct, active, and sloppy (Seem and Clark 2006). Later, when asked to describe the

characteristics of a healthy person (not gender specific), the list was nearly identical to that of a male.

This study uncovered the general assumption that being female is associated with being somewhat unhealthy or not of sound mind. This concept seems extremely dated, but in 2006, Seem and Clark replicated the study and found similar results. Again, the characteristics associated with a healthy male were very similar to that of a healthy (genderless) adult. The list of characteristics associated with being female broadened somewhat but did not show significant change from the original study (Seem and Clark 2006). This interpretation of feminine characteristic may help us one day better understand gender disparities in certain illnesses, such as why one in eight women can be expected to develop clinical depression in her lifetime (National Institute of Mental Health 1999). Perhaps these diagnoses are not just a reflection of women's health, but also a reflection of society's labeling of female characteristics, or the result of institutionalized sexism.

Summary

Children become aware of gender roles in their earliest years, and they come to understand and perform these roles through socialization, which occurs through four major agents: family, education, peer groups, and mass media. Socialization into narrowly prescribed gender roles results in the stratification of males and females. Each sociological perspective offers a valuable view for understanding how and why gender inequality occurs in our society.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following is the best example of a gender stereotype?

- a. Women are typically shorter than men.

- b. Men do not live as long as women.
 - c. Women tend to be overly emotional, while men tend to be levelheaded.
 - d. Men hold more high-earning, leadership jobs than women.
-

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following is the best example of the role peers play as an agent of socialization for school-aged children?

- a. Children can act however they wish around their peers because children are unaware of gender roles.
 - b. Peers serve as a support system for children who wish to act outside of their assigned gender roles.
 - c. Peers tend to reinforce gender roles by criticizing and marginalizing those who behave outside of their assigned roles.
 - d. None of the above
-

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

To which theoretical perspective does the following statement most likely apply: Women continue to assume the responsibility in the household along with a paid occupation because it keeps the household running smoothly, i.e., at a state of balance?

- a. Conflict theory
 - b. Functionalism
 - c. Feminist theory
 - d. Symbolic interactionism
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem: Only women are affected by gender stratification.

- a. True
 - b. False
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

According to the symbolic interactionist perspective, we “do gender”:

- a. during half of our activities
 - b. only when they apply to our biological sex
 - c. only if we are actively following gender roles
 - d. all of the time, in everything we do
-

Solution:

Answer

D

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

In what way do parents treat sons and daughters differently? How do sons and daughter typically respond to this treatment?

Exercise:

Problem:

What can be done to lessen the effects of gender stratification in the workplace? How does gender stratification harm both men and women?

Further Research

For more gender-related statistics see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center_disease_control/ and browse through to pictures like “gender and education” and “gender and health.”

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Glossary

doing gender

when people perform tasks based upon the gender assigned to them by society and, in turn, themselves

sexism

the prejudiced belief that one sex should be valued over another

Sex and Sexuality

- Understand different attitudes associated with sex and sexuality
- Define sexual inequality in various societies
- Discuss theoretical perspectives on sex and sexuality



Sexual practices can differ greatly among groups. Recent trends include the finding that married couples have sex more frequently than do singles and that 27 percent of married couples in their 30s have sex at least twice a week (NSSHB 2010). (Photo courtesy of epSos.de/flickr)

Sexual Attitudes and Practices

In the area of sexuality, sociologists focus their attention on sexual attitudes and practices, not on physiology or anatomy. **Sexuality** is viewed as a person's capacity for sexual feelings. Studying sexual attitudes and practices is a particularly interesting field of sociology because sexual behavior is a cultural universal. Throughout time and place, the vast

majority of human beings have participated in sexual relationships (Broude 2003). Each society, however, interprets sexuality and sexual activity in different ways. Many societies around the world have different attitudes about premarital sex, the age of sexual consent, homosexuality, masturbation, and other sexual behaviors that are not consistent with universally cultural norms (Widmer, Treas and Newcomb 1998). At the same time, sociologists have learned that certain norms (like disapproval of incest) are shared among most societies. Likewise, societies generally have norms that reinforce their accepted social system of sexuality.

What is considered “normal” in terms of sexual behavior is based on the mores and values of the society. Societies that value monogamy, for example, would likely oppose extramarital sex. Individuals are socialized to sexual attitudes by their family, education system, peers, media, and religion. Historically, religion has been the greatest influence on sexual behavior in most societies, but in more recent years, peers and the media have emerged as two of the strongest influences, particularly with American teens (Potard, Courtois, and Rusch 2008). Let us take a closer look at sexual attitudes in the United States and around the world.

Sexuality around the World

Cross-national research on sexual attitudes in industrialized nations reveals that normative standards differ across the world. For example, several studies have shown that Scandinavian students are more tolerant of premarital sex than are American students (Grose 2007). A study of 37 countries reported that non-Western societies—like China, Iran, and India—valued chastity highly in a potential mate, while Western European countries—such as France, the Netherlands, and Sweden—placed little value on prior sexual experiences (Buss 1989).

Even among Western cultures, attitudes can differ. For example, according to a 33,590-person survey across 24 countries, 89 percent of Swedes responded that there is nothing wrong with premarital sex, while only 42 percent of Irish responded this way. From the same study, 93 percent of Filipinos responded that sex before age 16 is always wrong or almost

always wrong, while only 75 percent of Russians responded this way (Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb 1998). Sexual attitudes can also vary within a country. For instance, 45 percent of Spaniards responded that homosexuality is always wrong, while 42 percent responded that it is never wrong; only 13 percent responded somewhere in the middle (Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb 1998).

Of industrialized nations, Sweden is thought to be the most liberal when it comes to attitudes about sex, including sexual practices and sexual openness. The country has very few regulations on sexual images in the media, and sex education, which starts around age six, is a compulsory part of Swedish school curricula. Sweden's permissive approach to sex has helped the country avoid some of the major social problems associated with sex. For example, rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease are among the world's lowest (Grose 2007). It would appear that Sweden is a model for the benefits of sexual freedom and frankness. However, implementing Swedish ideals and policies regarding sexuality in other, more politically conservative, nations would likely be met with resistance.

Sexuality in the United States

The United States prides itself on being the land of the "free," but it is rather restrictive when it comes to its citizens' general attitudes about sex compared to other industrialized nations. In an international survey, 29 percent of Americans stated that premarital sex is always wrong, while the average among the 24 countries surveyed was 17 percent. Similar discrepancies were found in questions about the condemnation of sex before the age of 16, extramarital sex, and homosexuality, with American total disapproval of these each acts being 12, 13, and 11 percent higher, respectively, than the study's average (Widmer, Treas and Newcomb 1998).

American culture is particularly restrictive in its attitudes about sex when it comes to women and sexuality. It is widely believed that men are more sexual than are women. In fact, there is a popular notion that men think about sex every seven seconds. Research, however, suggests that men think

about sex an average of 19 times per day, compared to 10 times per day for women (Fisher, Moore, and Pittenger 2011).

Belief that men have—or have the right to—more sexual urges than women creates a double standard. Ira Reiss, a pioneer researcher in the field of sexual studies, defined the *double standard* as prohibiting premarital sexual intercourse for women but allowing it for men (Reiss 1960). This standard has evolved into allowing women to engage in premarital sex only within committed love relationships, but allowing men to engage in sexual relationships with as many partners as they wish without condition (Milhausen and Herold 1999). Due to this double standard, a woman is likely to have fewer sexual partners in her life time than a man. According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) survey, the average 35-year-old woman has had three opposite-sex sexual partners while the average 35-year-old man has had twice as many (Centers for Disease Control 2011).

The future of a society's sexual attitudes may be somewhat predicted by the values and beliefs that a country's youth expresses about sex and sexuality. Data from the 2008 National Survey of Family Growth reveals that 64 percent of boys and 71 percent of girls ages 15–19 said they “agree” or “strongly agree” that “it’s okay for an unmarried female to have a child.” In a separate survey, 65 percent of teens stated that they “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” that although waiting until marriage for sex is a nice idea, it’s not realistic (NBC News 2005). This does not mean that today’s youth have given up traditional sexual values such as monogamy. Nearly all college men (98.9 percent) and women (99.2 percent) who participated in a 2002 study on sexual attitudes stated they wished to settle down with one mutually exclusive sexual partner at some point in their lives, ideally within the next five years (Pedersen et al. 2002).

Sex Education

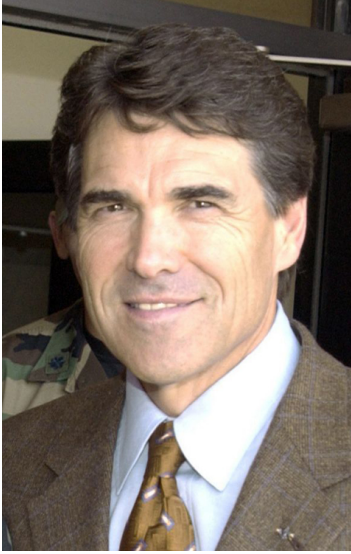
One of the biggest controversies regarding sexual attitudes is sexual education in American classrooms. Unlike in Sweden, sex education is not required in all public school curricula in the United States. The heart of the

controversy is not about whether sex education should be taught in school (studies have shown that only seven percent of Americans oppose sex education in schools), it is about the *type* of sex education that should be taught.

Much of the debate is over the issue of abstinence. In a 2005 survey, 15 percent of Americans believed that schools should teach abstinence exclusively and should not provide contraceptives or information on how to obtain them. Forty-six percent believed that schools should institute an abstinence-plus approach, which teaches children that abstinence is best, but still gives information about protected sex. Thirty-six percent believed that teaching about abstinence is not important and that sex education should focus on sexual safety and responsibility (NPR 2010).

Research suggests that while government officials may still be debating about the content of sexual education in public schools, the majority of Americans are not. Those who advocated for abstinence-only programs may be the proverbial squeaky wheel when it comes to this controversy, as they represent only 15 percent of parents. Fifty-five percent of Americans feel that giving teens information about sex and how to obtain and use protection will not encourage them to have sexual relations earlier than they would under an abstinence program. Additionally, 77 percent think such a curriculum would make teens more likely to practice safe sex now and in the future (NPR 2004).

Sweden, which has a comprehensive sex education program in its public schools that educates participants about safe sex, can serve as a model for this approach. The teenage birthrate in Sweden is 7 per 1,000 births, compared with 49 per 1,000 births in the United States. Additionally, among 15- to 19-year-olds, reported cases of gonorrhea in Sweden are nearly 600 times lower than in the United States (Grose 2007).



Despite having a socially conservative ideology, Republican presidential nominee hopeful Rick Perry mandated the HPV vaccine for middle-school girls in his home state of Texas. Since the vaccine, which helps prevent cervical cancer, also protects against a sexually-transmitted virus, abstinence-only conservatives criticized his action. (Photo courtesy of Sandy Wassenmiller/Wikimedia Commons)

Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Sexuality

Sociologists representing all three major theoretical perspectives study the role that sexuality plays in social life today. Scholars recognize that sexuality continues to be an important and defining social location and that the manner in which sexuality is constructed has a significant effect on perceptions, interactions, and outcomes.

Structural Functionalism

When it comes to sexuality, functionalists stress the importance of regulating sexual behavior to ensure marital cohesion and family stability. Since functionalists identify the family unit as the most integral component in society, they maintain a strict focus on it at all times and argue in favor of social arrangements that promote and ensure family preservation.

Functionalists such as Talcott Parsons (1955) have long argued that the regulation of sexual activity is an important function of the family. Social norms surrounding family life have, traditionally, encouraged sexual activity within the family unit (marriage) and have discouraged activity outside of it (premarital and extramarital sex). From a functionalist point of view, the purpose of encouraging sexual activity in the confines of marriage is to intensify the bond between spouses and to ensure that procreation occurs within a stable, legally recognized relationship. This structure gives offspring the best possible chance for appropriate socialization and the provision of basic resources.

From a functionalist standpoint, homosexuality cannot be promoted on a large-scale as an acceptable substitute for heterosexuality. If this occurred, procreation would eventually cease. Thus, homosexuality, if occurring predominantly within the population, is dysfunctional to society. This criticism does not take into account the increasing legal acceptance of same-sex marriage, or the rise in gay and lesbian couples who choose to bear and raise children through a variety of available resources.

Conflict Theory

From a conflict theory perspective, sexuality is another area in which power differentials are present and where dominant groups actively work to promote their worldview as well as their economic interests. Recently, we have seen the debate over the legalization of gay marriage intensify nationwide. While five states (Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, New Hampshire, and Vermont) and the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage, 30 states have adopted statutes or constitutional provisions preventing same-sex marriage. One of these provisions, the Defense of Marriage Act, states that marriage between one man and one woman is the only domestic legal union that shall be valid or recognized.

For conflict theorists, there are two key dimensions to the debate over same-sex marriage—one ideological and the other economic. Dominant groups (in this instance, heterosexuals) wish for their worldview—which embraces traditional marriage and the nuclear family—to win out over what they see as the intrusion of a secular, individually driven worldview. On the other hand, many gay and lesbian activists argue that legal marriage is a fundamental right that cannot be denied based on sexual orientation and that, historically, there already exists a precedent for changes to marriage laws: the 1960s legalization of formerly forbidden interracial marriages is one example.

From an economic perspective, activists in favor of same-sex marriage point out that legal marriage brings with it certain entitlements, many of which are financial in nature, like Social Security benefits and medical insurance (Solmonese 2008). Denial of these benefits to gay couples is wrong, they argue. Conflict theory suggests that as long as heterosexuals and homosexuals struggle over these social and financial resources, there will be some degree of conflict.

Symbolic Interactionism

Interactionists focus on the meanings associated with sexuality and with sexual orientation. Since femininity is devalued in American society, those who adopt such traits are subject to ridicule; this is especially true for boys or men. Just as masculinity is the symbolic norm, so too has heterosexuality

come to signify normalcy. Prior to 1973, the American Psychological Association (APA) defined homosexuality as an abnormal or deviant disorder. Interactionist labeling theory recognizes the impact this has made. Before 1973, the APA was powerful in shaping social attitudes toward homosexuality by defining it as pathological. Today, the APA cites no association between sexual orientation and psychopathology and sees homosexuality as a normal aspect of human sexuality (APA 2008).

Interactionists are also interested in how discussions of homosexuals often focus almost exclusively on the sex lives of gays and lesbians; homosexuals, especially men, may be assumed to be hypersexual and, in some cases, deviant. Interactionism might also focus on the slurs used to describe homosexuals. Labels such as “queen” and “fag” are often used to demean homosexual men by feminizing them. This subsequently affects how homosexuals perceive themselves. Recall Cooley’s “looking-glass self,” which suggests that self develops as a result of one’s interpretation and evaluation of the responses of others (Cooley 1902). Constant exposure to derogatory labels, jokes, and pervasive homophobia would lead to a negative self-image, or worse, self-hate. The CDC reports that homosexual youths who experience high levels of social rejection are six times more likely to have high levels of depression and eight times more likely to have attempted suicide (CDC 2011).

Queer Theory

Queer Theory is a perspective that problematizes the manner in which we have been taught to think about sexual orientation. By calling their discipline “queer,” these scholars are rejecting the effects of labeling; instead, they embrace the word “queer” and have reclaimed it for their own purposes. Queer theorists reject the dichotomization of sexual orientations into two mutually exclusive outcomes, homosexual or heterosexual. Rather, the perspective highlights the need for a more flexible and fluid conceptualization of sexuality—one that allows for change, negotiation, and freedom. The current schema used to classify individuals as either “heterosexual” or “homosexual” pits one orientation against the other. This

mirrors other oppressive schemas in our culture, especially those surrounding gender and race (black versus white, male versus female).

Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argued against American society's monolithic definition of sexuality—against its reduction to a single factor: the sex of one's desired partner. Sedgwick identified dozens of other ways in which people's sexualities were different, such as:

- Even identical genital acts mean very different things to different people.
- Sexuality makes up a large share of the self-perceived identity of some people, a small share of others'.
- Some people spend a lot of time thinking about sex, others little.
- Some people like to have a lot of sex, others little or none.
- Many people have their richest mental/emotional involvement with sexual acts that they don't do, or don't even want to do.
- Some people like spontaneous sexual scenes, others like highly scripted ones, others like spontaneous-sounding ones that are nonetheless totally predictable.
- Some people, homo- hetero- and bisexual, experience their sexuality as deeply embedded in a matrix of gender meanings and gender differentials. Others of each sexuality do not (Sedgwick 1990).

In the end, queer theory strives to question the ways society perceives and experiences sex, gender, and sexuality, opening the door to new scholarly understanding.

Throughout this chapter we have examined the complexities of gender, sex, and sexuality. Differentiating between sex, gender, and sexual orientation is an important first step to a deeper understanding and critical analysis of these issues. Understanding the sociology of sex, gender, and sexuality will help to build awareness of the inequalities experienced by subordinate groups such as women, homosexuals, and transgendered individuals.

Summary

When studying sex and sexuality, sociologists focus their attention on sexual attitudes and practices, not on physiology or anatomy. Norms regarding gender and sexuality vary across cultures. In general, the United States tends to be fairly conservative in its sexual attitudes. As a result, homosexuals continue to face opposition and discrimination in most major social institutions.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

What Western country is thought to be the most liberal in its attitudes toward sex?

- a. United States
- b. Sweden
- c. Mexico
- d. Ireland

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Compared to most Western societies, American sexual attitudes are considered _____.

- a. conservative
 - b. liberal
 - c. permissive
 - d. free
-

Solution:
Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem: Sociologists associate sexuality with _____.

- a. heterosexuality
- b. homosexuality
- c. biological factors
- d. a person's capacity for sexual feelings

Solution:
Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

According to national surveys, most American parents support which type of sex education program in school?

- a. Abstinence only
- b. Abstinence plus sexual safety
- c. Sexual safety without promoting abstinence
- d. No sex education

Solution:
Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Which theoretical perspective stresses the importance of regulating sexual behavior to ensure marital cohesion and family stability?

- a. Functionalism
- b. Conflict theory
- c. Symbolic interactionism
- d. Queer theory

Solution:**Answer**

A

Short Answer**Exercise:****Problem:**

Identify three examples of how American society is heteronormative.

Exercise:**Problem:**

Consider the types of derogatory labeling that sociologists study and explain how these might apply to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Further Research

For more information about sexual attitudes and practices in countries around the world, see the entire “Attitudes Toward Nonmarital Sex in 24 Countries” article from the *Journal of Sex Research* at http://openstaxcollege.org/l/journal_of_sex_research

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Glossary

double standard

concept that prohibits premarital sexual intercourse for women but allows it for men

queer theory

a scholarly discipline that questions fixed (normative) definitions of gender and sexuality

sexuality

a person's capacity for sexual feelings

Introduction to Race and Ethnicity class="introduction"

Race and
ethnicity are
part of the
human
experience.

How do
racial and
ethnic
diversity
play in a
role in who
we are?

(Photo
courtesy of
Agecom
Bahia/flickr
)



In a mixed vocational/academic high school, Ms. Ellis grades papers for her large, diverse, 11th grade English class. She is currently looking at the papers of three students: Jose, who is Dominican, Kim, who is Vietnamese, and Anthony, who is Italian American.

Jose's grasp of English is weak, and he doesn't show a high degree of understanding of the themes of *Hamlet*. However, Ms. Ellis knows that Jose tried hard, and she also believes that, like many of his fellow Hispanic students, he will probably not go to college and continue any studies of English literature. His parents do not speak English and are not overly involved in his schooling. Jose excels in Automotive Shop, which prepares him for a job in that industry, so Ms. Ellis feels that to push him in English will not help him. She gives him a C+ and a few neutral words of encouragement without spending a lot of time pointing out where he could improve.

Ms. Ellis wishes she could have more students like Kim. Kim is unfailingly polite, interested, and hardworking, even though her English still needs work. Her paper on *Hamlet* is far from perfect, but Ms. Ellis knows that she

probably worked harder on it than anyone in the class. As is the case with most of Ms. Ellis's Asian students, both of Kim's parents are anxious for Kim to go to college, so even though Kim's paper does not show much more understanding of *Hamlet* than Jose's, Ms. Ellis gives her a B and writes ample comments for areas of improvement.

Anthony is a thorn in Ms. Ellis's side. In this school where most of the teachers and vocational instructors are Irish American or Italian American, Anthony has always felt at home and overconfident. His uncle is on the staff, and he has several siblings and cousins who have gone through the school. He is aggressive and disruptive in class, distracting other students and causing Ms. Ellis to spend an inordinate amount of time on maintaining discipline. Anthony's paper is about the same level as Jose's and Kim's, but since English is his first language, he really should be able to perform better. Ms. Ellis gives him a C- and a few curt comments.

Ms. Ellis graded three similar papers very differently. She didn't grade them only on their merits; she relied heavily on her own knowledge of and feelings about the students themselves. Ms. Ellis was guided by her prejudices: her preconceived notions of the students' work, attitudes, and abilities. To the extent that her prejudices affected her actions, Ms. Ellis also practiced discrimination. But what do these terms mean? Does everyone have prejudices? Is everyone guilty of discrimination? How does our society foster institutional prejudice and discrimination?

Racial, Ethnic, and Minority Groups

- Understand the difference between race and ethnicity
- Define a majority group (dominant group)
- Define a minority group (subordinate group)

While many students first entering a sociology classroom are accustomed to conflating the terms “race,” “ethnicity,” and “minority group,” these three terms have distinct meanings for sociologists. The idea of race refers to superficial physical differences that a particular society considers significant, while ethnicity is a term that describes shared culture. And minority groups describe groups that are subordinate, or lacking power in society regardless of skin color or country of origin. For example, in modern U.S. history, the elderly might be considered a minority group due to a diminished status resulting from popular prejudice and discrimination against them. The World Health Organization’s research on elderly maltreatment shows that 10 percent of nursing home staff admit to physically abusing an elderly person in the past year, and 40 percent admit to psychological abuse (2011). As a minority group, the elderly are also subject to economic, social, and workplace discrimination.

What Is Race?

Historically, the concept of race has changed across cultures and eras, eventually becoming less connected with ancestral and familial ties, and more concerned with superficial physical characteristics. In the past, theorists have posited categories of race based on various geographic regions, ethnicities, skin colors, and more. Their labels for racial groups have connoted regions (Mongolia and the Caucus Mountains, for instance) or denoted skin tones (black, white, yellow, and red, for example).

However, this typology of race developed during early racial science has fallen into disuse, and the **social construction of race** is a far more common way of understanding racial categories. According to this school of thought, race is not biologically identifiable. When considering skin color, for example, the social construction of race perspective recognizes that the relative darkness or fairness of skin is an evolutionary adaptation to

the available sunlight in different regions of the world. Contemporary conceptions of race, therefore, which tend to be based on socioeconomic assumptions, illuminate how far removed modern race understanding is from biological qualities. In modern society, some people who consider themselves “white” actually have more melanin (a pigment that determines skin color) in their skin than other people who identify as “black.” Consider the case of the actress Rashida Jones. She is the daughter of a black man (Quincy Jones) but she does not play a black woman in her television or film roles. In some countries, such as Brazil, class is more important than skin color in determining racial categorization. People with high levels of melanin in their skin may consider themselves “white” if they enjoy a middle-class lifestyle. On the other hand, someone with low levels of melanin in their skin might be assigned the identity of “black” if they have little education or money.

The social construction of race is also reflected in the way that names for racial categories change with changing times. It’s worth noting that race, in this sense, is also a system of labeling that provides a source of identity; specific labels fall in and out of favor during different social eras. For example, the category “negroid,” popular in the 19th century, evolved into the term “negro” by the 1960s, and then this term fell from use and was replaced with “African American.” This latter term was intended to celebrate the multiple identities that a black person might hold, but the word choice is a poor one: it lumps together a large variety of ethnic groups under an umbrella term while excluding others who could accurately be described by the label but who do not meet the spirit of the term. For example, actress Charlize Theron is a blonde-haired, blue-eyed “African American.” She was born in South Africa and later became a U.S. citizen. Is her identity that of an “African American” as most of us understand the term?

What Is Ethnicity?

Ethnicity is a term that describes shared culture—the practices, values, and beliefs of a group. This might include shared language, religion, and traditions, among other commonalities. Like race, the term ethnicity is difficult to describe and its meaning has changed over time. And like race, individuals may be identified or self-identify to ethnicities in complex, even

contradictory, ways. For example, ethnic groups such as Irish, Italian American, Russian, Jewish, and Serbian might all be groups whose members are predominantly included in the racial category “white.” Conversely, the ethnic group British includes citizens from a multiplicity of racial backgrounds: black, white, Asian, and more, plus a variety of race combinations. These examples illustrate the complexity and overlap of these identifying terms. Ethnicity, like race, continues to be an identification method that individuals and institutions use today—whether through the census, affirmative action initiatives, non-discrimination laws, or simply in personal day-to-day relations.

What Are Minority Groups?

Sociologist Louis Wirth (1945) defined a **minority group** as “any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination.” The term minority connotes discrimination, and in its sociological use, the term **subordinate** can be used interchangeably with the term minority, while the term **dominant** is often substituted for the group that’s in the majority. These definitions correlate to the concept that the dominant group is that which holds the most power in a given society, while subordinate groups are those who lack power compared to the dominant group.

Note that being a numerical minority is not a characteristic of being a minority group; sometimes larger groups can be considered minority groups due to their lack of power. It is the lack of power that is the predominant characteristic of a minority, or subordinate group. For example, consider Apartheid in South Africa, in which a numerical majority (the black inhabitants of the country) were exploited and oppressed by the white minority.

According to Charles Wagley and Marvin Harris (1958), a minority group is distinguished by five characteristics: (1) unequal treatment and less power over their lives, (2) distinguishing physical or cultural traits like skin color or language, (3) involuntary membership in the group, (4) awareness of

subordination, and (5) high rate of in-group marriage. Additional examples of minority groups might include the LGBT community, religious practitioners whose faith is not widely practiced where they live, and people with disabilities.

Scapegoat theory, developed initially from Dollard's (1939) Frustration-Aggression theory, suggests that the dominant group will displace their unfocused aggression onto a subordinate group. History has shown us many examples of the scapegoating of a subordinate group. An example from the last century is the way that Adolf Hitler was able to use the Jewish people as scapegoats for Germany's social and economic problems. In the United States, recent immigrants have frequently been the scapegoat for the nation's—or an individual's—woes. Many states have enacted laws to disenfranchise immigrants; these laws are popular because they let the dominant group scapegoat a subordinate group.

Multiple Identities



Golfer Tiger Woods has Chinese, Thai, African American, Native American, and Dutch heritage. Individuals with multiple ethnic backgrounds are becoming more common. (Photo courtesy of familymwr/flickr)

Prior to the 20th century, racial intermarriage (referred to as miscegenation) was extremely rare, and in many places, illegal. While the sexual subordination of slaves did result in children of mixed race, these children were usually considered black, and therefore, property. There was no question of multiple racial identities with the possible exception of the Creole. Creole society developed in the port city of New Orleans, where a mixed-race culture grew from French and African inhabitants. Unlike in other parts of the country, “Creoles of color” had greater social, economic, and educational opportunities than most African Americans.

Increasingly during the modern era, the removal of miscegenation laws and a trend toward equal rights and legal protection against racism have steadily reduced the social stigma attached to racial exogamy (exogamy refers to marriage outside of one’s core social unit). It is now common for the children of racially mixed parents to acknowledge and celebrate their various ethnic identities. Golfer Tiger Woods, for instance, has Chinese, Thai, African American, Native American, and Dutch heritage; he jokingly refers to his ethnicity as “Cablinasian,” a term he coined to combine several of his ethnic backgrounds. While this is the trend, it is not yet evident in all aspects of our society. For example, the U.S. Census only recently added additional categories for people to identify themselves, such as non-white Hispanic. A growing number of people chose multiple races to describe themselves on the 2010 Census, paving the way for the 2020 Census to provide yet more choices.

Summary

Race is fundamentally a social construct. Ethnicity is a term that describes shared culture and national origin. Minority groups are defined by their lack of power.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: The racial term “African American” can refer to:

- a. a black person living in America
- b. people whose ancestors came to America through the slave trade
- c. a white person who originated in Africa and now lives in the United States
- d. any of the above

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem: What is the one defining feature of a minority group?

- a. Self-definition
- b. Numerical minority
- c. Lack of power
- d. Strong cultural identity

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem: Ethnicity describes shared:

- a. beliefs
 - b. language
 - c. religion
 - d. any of the above
-

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following is an example of a numerical majority being treated as a subordinate group?

- a. Jewish people in Germany
 - b. Creoles in New Orleans
 - c. White people in Brazil
 - d. Blacks under Apartheid in South Africa
-

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem: Scapegoat theory shows that:

- a. subordinate groups blame dominant groups for their problems

- b. dominant groups blame subordinate groups for their problems
 - c. some people are predisposed to prejudice
 - d. all of the above
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Why do you think the term “minority” has persisted when the word “subordinate” is more descriptive?

Exercise:

Problem:

How do you describe your ethnicity? Do you include your family’s country of origin? Do you consider yourself multiethnic? How does your ethnicity compare to that of the people you spend most of your time with?

Further Research

Explore aspects of race and ethnicity at PBS’s site, “What Is Race?”: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/PBS_what_is_race

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Glossary

dominant group

a group of people who have more power in a society than any of the subordinate groups

ethnicity

shared culture, which may include heritage, language, religion, and more

minority group

any group of people who are singled out from the others for differential and unequal treatment

scapegoat theory

suggests that the dominant group will displace its unfocused aggression onto a subordinate group

social construction of race

the school of thought that race is not biologically identifiable

subordinate group

a group of people who have less power than the dominant group

Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination

- Explain the difference between stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and racism
- Identify different types of discrimination

Stereotypes

The terms stereotype, prejudice, discrimination, and racism are often used interchangeably in everyday conversation. But when discussing these terms from a sociological perspective, it is important to define them: **stereotypes** are oversimplified ideas about groups of people, **prejudice** refers to thoughts and feelings about those groups, while **discrimination** refers to actions toward them. **Racism** is a type of prejudice that involves set beliefs about a specific racial group.

As stated above, stereotypes are oversimplified ideas about groups of people. Stereotypes can be based on race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation—almost any characteristic. They may be positive (usually about one's own group, such as when women suggest they are less likely to complain about physical pain) but are often negative (usually toward other groups, such as when members of a dominant racial group suggest that a subordinate racial group is stupid or lazy). In either case, the stereotype is a generalization that doesn't take individual differences into account.

Where do stereotypes come from? In fact new stereotypes are rarely created; rather, they are recycled from subordinate groups that have assimilated into society and are reused to describe newly subordinate groups. For example, many stereotypes that are currently used to characterize black people were used earlier in American history to characterize Irish and Eastern European immigrants.

Prejudice and Racism

Prejudice refers to beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes that someone holds about a group. A prejudice is not based on experience; instead, it is a prejudgment, originating outside of actual experience. Racism is a type of

prejudice that is used to justify the belief that one racial category is somehow superior or inferior to others. The Ku Klux Klan is an example of a racist organization; its members' belief in white supremacy has encouraged over a century of hate crime and hate speech.

Discrimination

While prejudice refers to biased *thinking*, discrimination consists of *actions* against a group of people. Discrimination can be based on age, religion, health, and other indicators; race-based discrimination and antidiscrimination laws strive to address this set of social problems.

Discrimination based on race or ethnicity can take many forms, from unfair housing practices to biased hiring systems. Overt discrimination has long been part of U.S. history. In the late 19th century, it was not uncommon for business owners to hang signs that read, "Help Wanted: No Irish Need Apply." And of course, southern Jim Crow laws, with their "Whites Only" signs, exemplified overt discrimination that is not tolerated today.

However, discrimination cannot be erased from our culture just by enacting laws to abolish it. Even if a magic pill managed to eradicate racism from each individual's psyche, society itself would maintain it. Sociologist Émile Durkheim calls racism a social fact, meaning that it does not require the action of individuals to continue. The reasons for this are complex and relate to the educational, criminal, economic, and political systems that exist.

For example, when a newspaper prints the race of individuals accused of a crime, it may enhance stereotypes of a certain minority. Another example of racist practices is **racial steering**, in which real estate agents direct prospective homeowners toward or away from certain neighborhoods based on their race. Racist attitudes and beliefs are often more insidious and hard to pin down than specific racist practices.

Prejudice and discrimination can overlap and intersect in many ways. To illustrate, here are four examples of how prejudice and discrimination can occur. *Unprejudiced nondiscriminators* are open-minded, tolerant, and

accepting individuals. *Unprejudiced discriminators* might be those who, unthinkingly, practice sexism in their workplace by not considering females for certain positions that have traditionally been held by men. *Prejudiced nondiscriminators* are those who hold racist beliefs but don't act on them, such as a racist store owner who serves minority customers. *Prejudiced discriminators* include those who actively make disparaging remarks about others or who perpetuate hate crimes.

Discrimination also manifests in different ways. The illustrations above are examples of individual discrimination, but other types exist. Institutional discrimination is when a societal system has developed with an embedded disenfranchisement of a group, such as the U.S. military's historical nonacceptance of minority sexualities as recently experienced surrounding the "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

Institutional discrimination can also involve the promotion of a group's status, such as occurs with white privilege. While most white people are willing to admit that non-white people live with a set of disadvantages due to the color of their skin, very few white people are willing to acknowledge the benefits they receive simply by being white. **White privilege** refers to the fact that dominant groups often accept their experience as the normative (and hence, superior) experience. Failure to recognize this "normality" as race-based is an example of a dominant group institutionalizing racism. Feminist sociologist Peggy McIntosh (1988) described several examples of "white privilege." For instance, white women can easily find makeup that matches their skin tone. White people can be assured that, most of the time, they will be dealing with authority figures of their own race. How many other examples of white privilege can you think of?

Note:

The Confederate Flag vs. the First Amendment



To some, the Confederate flag is a symbol of pride in Southern history. To others, it is a grim reminder of a degrading period of America's past. (Photo courtesy of Eyeliam/flickr)

In January 2006, two girls walked into Burleson High School in Texas carrying purses that displayed large images of Confederate flags. School administrators told the girls that they were in violation of the dress code, which prohibited apparel with inappropriate symbolism or clothing that discriminated based on race. To stay in school, they'd have to have someone pick up their purses or leave them in the office. The girls chose to go home for the day, but proceeded on a path of challenging the action, appealing first to the principal, then to the district superintendent, then to the U.S. District Court, and finally to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Why did the school ban the purses, and why did they stand behind that ban, even when being sued? Why did the girls, identified anonymously in court documents as A.M. and A.T., pursue such strong legal measures for their right to carry the purses? The issue, of course, is not the purses: it is the Confederate flag that adorns them. This case, *A.M. and A.T. v Burleson Independent School District et al.* (2009), joins a long line of people and institutions that have fought for their right to display the Confederate flag. In the end, the court sided with the district and noted that the Confederate

flag carried symbolism significant enough to disrupt normal school activities.

While many young Americans like to believe that racism is mostly in the country's past, this case illustrates how racism and discrimination are quite alive today. If the Confederate flag is synonymous with slavery, is there any place for its display in modern society? Those who fight for their right to display the flag say that such a display should be covered by the First Amendment: the right to free speech. But others say that the flag is equivalent to hate speech, which is not covered by the First Amendment. Do you think that displaying the Confederate flag should be considered free speech or hate speech?

Summary

Stereotypes are oversimplified ideas about groups of people. Prejudice refers to thoughts and feelings, while discrimination refers to actions. Racism refers to the belief that one race is inherently superior or inferior to other races.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: Stereotypes can be based on:

- a. race
- b. ethnicity
- c. gender
- d. all of the above

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem: What is discrimination?

- a. Biased thoughts against an individual or group
 - b. Biased actions against an individual or group
 - c. Belief that a race different from yours is inferior
 - d. Another word for stereotyping
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following is the best explanation of racism as a social fact?

- a. It needs to be eradicated by laws.
 - b. It is like a magic pill.
 - c. It does not need the actions of individuals to continue.
 - d. None of the above
-

Solution:

Answer

C

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

How does racial steering contribute to institutionalized racism?

Exercise:**Problem:**

Give an example of stereotyping that you see in everyday life. Explain what would need to happen for this to be eliminated.

Further Research

How far should First Amendment rights extend? Read more about the subject at the First Amendment Center:

http://openstaxcollege.org/l/first_amendment_center

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Glossary

discrimination

prejudiced action against a group of people

prejudice

biased thought based on flawed assumptions about a group of people

racial steering

when real estate agents direct prospective homeowners toward or away from certain neighborhoods based on their race

racism

a set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices that are used to justify the belief that one racial category is somehow superior or inferior to others

stereotypes

oversimplified ideas about groups of people

white privilege

the benefits people receive simply by being part of the dominant group

Theories of Race and Ethnicity

- Describe how major sociological perspectives view race and ethnicity
- Identify examples of culture of prejudice

Theoretical Perspectives

Issues of race and ethnicity can be observed through three major sociological perspectives: functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism. As you read through these theories, ask yourself which one makes the most sense, and why. Is more than one theory needed to explain racism, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination?

Functionalism

In the view of functionalism, racial and ethnic inequalities must have served an important function in order to exist as long as they have. This concept, of course, is problematic. How can racism and discrimination contribute positively to society? Sociologists who adhere to the functionalist view argue that racism and discrimination *do* contribute positively, but only to the dominant group. Historically, it has indeed served dominant groups well to discriminate against subordinate groups. Slavery, of course, was beneficial to slaveholders. Holding racist views can benefit those who want to deny rights and privileges to people they view as inferior to them, but over time, racism harms society. Outcomes of race-based disenfranchisement—such as poverty levels, crime rates, and discrepancies in employment and education opportunities—illustrate the long-term (and clearly negative) results of slavery and racism in American society.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theories are often applied to inequalities of gender, social class, education, race, and ethnicity. A conflict theory perspective of U.S. history would examine the numerous past and current struggles between the white

ruling class and racial and ethnic minorities, noting specific conflicts that have arisen when the dominant group perceived a threat from the minority group. In the late 19th century, the rising power of black Americans after the Civil War resulted in draconian Jim Crow laws that severely limited black political and social power. The years since then have showed a pattern of attempted disenfranchisement, with gerrymandering and voter suppression efforts aimed at predominantly minority neighborhoods.

Feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) developed **intersection theory**, which suggests we cannot separate the effects of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other attributes. When we examine race and how it can bring us both advantages and disadvantages, it is important to acknowledge that the way we experience race is shaped, for example, by our gender and class. Multiple layers of disadvantage intersect to create the way we experience race. For example, if we want to understand prejudice, we must understand that the prejudice focused on a white woman because of her gender is very different from the layered prejudice focused on a poor Asian woman, who is affected by stereotypes related to being poor, being a woman, and her ethnic status.

Interactionism

For symbolic interactionists, race and ethnicity provide strong symbols as sources of identity. In fact, some interactionists propose that the symbols of race, not race itself, are what lead to racism. Famed Interactionist Herbert Blumer (1958) suggested that racial prejudice is formed through interactions between members of the dominant group: Without these interactions, individuals in the dominant group would not hold racist views. These interactions contribute to an abstract picture of the subordinate group that allows the dominant group to support its view of the subordinate group, thus maintaining the status quo. An example of this might be an individual whose beliefs about a particular group are based on images conveyed in popular media, and those are unquestionably believed because the individual has never personally met a member of that group.

Culture of Prejudice

Culture of prejudice refers to the theory that prejudice is embedded in our culture. We grow up surrounded by images of stereotypes and casual expressions of racism and prejudice. Consider the casually racist imagery on grocery store shelves or the stereotypes that fill popular movies and advertisements. It is easy to see how someone living in the Northeastern United States, who may know no Mexican Americans personally, might gain a stereotyped impression from such sources as Speedy Gonzalez or Taco Bell's talking Chihuahua. Because we are all exposed to these images and thoughts, it is impossible to know to what extent they have influenced our thought processes.

Summary

Functionalist views of race study the role dominant and subordinate groups play to create a stable social structure. Conflict theorists examine power disparities and struggles between various racial and ethnic groups. Interactionists see race and ethnicity as important sources of individual identity and social symbolism. The concept of culture of prejudice recognizes that all people are subject to stereotypes that are ingrained in their culture.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

As a Caucasian in the United States, being reasonably sure that you will be dealing with authority figures of the same race as you is a result of:

- a. intersection theory
- b. conflict theory
- c. white privilege
- d. scapegoating theory

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem: Speedy Gonzalez is an example of:

- a. intersection theory
- b. stereotyping
- c. interactionist view
- d. culture of prejudice

Solution:

Answer

B

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Give three examples of white privilege. Do you know people who have experienced this? From what perspective?

Exercise:

Problem:

What is the worst example of culture of prejudice you can think of? What are your reasons for thinking it is the worst?

Further Research

Do you know someone who practices white privilege? Do you practice it? Explore the concept with this checklist: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/white_privilege_checklist to see how much of it holds true for you or others.

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Glossary

culture of prejudice

the theory that prejudice is embedded in our culture

intersection theory

theory that suggests we cannot separate the effects of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other attributes

Intergroup Relationships

- Explain different intergroup relations in terms of their relative levels of tolerance
- Give historical and/or contemporary examples of each type of intergroup relation

Intergroup relations (relationships between different groups of people) range along a spectrum between tolerance and intolerance. The most tolerant form of intergroup relations is pluralism, in which no distinction is made between minority and majority groups, but instead there's equal standing. At the other end of the continuum are amalgamation, expulsion, and even genocide—stark examples of intolerant intergroup relations.

Genocide

Genocide, the deliberate annihilation of a targeted (usually subordinate) group, is the most toxic intergroup relationship. Historically, we can see that genocide has included both the intent to exterminate a group and the function of exterminating of a group, intentional or not.

Possibly the most well-known case of genocide is Hitler's attempt to exterminate the Jewish people in the first part of the 20th century. Also known as the Holocaust, the explicit goal of Hitler's "Final Solution" was the eradication of European Jewry, as well as the decimation of other minority groups such as Catholics, people with disabilities, and homosexuals. With forced emigration, concentration camps, and mass executions in gas chambers, Hitler's Nazi regime was responsible for the deaths of 12 million people, six million of whom were Jewish. Hitler's intent was clear, and the high Jewish death toll certainly indicates that Hitler and his regime committed genocide. But how do we understand genocide that is not so overt and deliberate?

During the European colonization of the United States, some historians estimate that Native American populations dwindled from approximately 12 million people in the year 1500 to barely 237,000 Native Americans by the year 1900 (Lewy 2004). European settlers coerced American Indians off

their own lands, often causing thousands of deaths in forced removals, such as occurred in the Cherokee or Potawatomi Trail of Tears. Settlers also enslaved Native Americans and forced them to give up their religious and cultural practices. But the major cause of Native American death was neither slavery nor war nor forced removal: it was the introduction of European diseases and Indians' lack of immunity to them. Smallpox, diphtheria, and measles flourished among indigenous American tribes who had no exposure to the diseases and no ability to fight them. Quite simply, these diseases decimated the tribes. How planned this genocide was remains a topic of contention. Some argue that the spread of disease was an unintended effect of conquest, while others believe it was intentional with rumors of smallpox-infected blankets being distributed as "gifts" to tribes.

Importantly, genocide is not just a historical concept, but one practiced today. Recently, ethnic and geographic conflicts in the Darfur region of Sudan have led to hundreds of thousands of deaths. As part of an ongoing land conflict, the Sudanese government and their state-sponsored Janjaweed militia have led a campaign of killing, forced displacement, and systematic rape of Darfuri people. Although a treaty was signed in 2011, the peace is fragile and may break under pressure.

Expulsion

Expulsion refers to a subordinate group being forced, by a dominant group, to leave a certain area or country. As seen in the examples of the Trail of Tears and the Holocaust, expulsion can be a factor in genocide. However, it can also stand on its own as a destructive group interaction. Expulsion has often occurred historically with an ethnic or racial basis. In the United States, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 in 1942, after the Japanese government's attack on Pearl Harbor. The Order authorized the establishment of internment camps for anyone with as little as one-eighth Japanese ancestry (i.e., one great-grandparent who was Japanese). Over 120,000 legal Japanese residents and Japanese American citizens, many of them children, were held in these camps for up to four years, despite the fact that there was never any evidence of collusion or espionage. (In fact, many Japanese Americans continued to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States by serving in the American military during

the War.) In the 1990s, the U.S. executive branch issued a formal apology for this expulsion; reparation efforts continue today.

Segregation

Segregation refers to the physical separation of two groups, particularly in residence, but also in workplace and social functions. It is important to distinguish between *de jure* segregation (segregation that is enforced by law) and *de facto* segregation (segregation that occurs without laws but because of other factors). A stark example of *de jure* segregation is the apartheid movement of South Africa, which existed from 1948 to 1994. Under apartheid, black South Africans were stripped of their civil rights and forcibly relocated to areas that segregated them physically from their white compatriots. Only after decades of degradation, violent uprisings, and international advocacy was apartheid finally abolished.

De jure segregation occurred in the United States for many years after the Civil War. During this time, many former Confederate states passed “Jim Crow” laws that required segregated facilities for blacks and whites. These laws were codified in 1896’s landmark Supreme Court case *Plessey v. Ferguson*, which stated that “separate but equal” facilities were constitutional. For the next five decades, blacks were subjected to legalized discrimination, forced to live, work, and go to school in separate—but *unequal*—facilities. It wasn’t until 1954 and the *Brown v. Board of Education* case that the Supreme Court declared that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal,” thus ending *de jure* segregation in the United States.



In the “Jim Crow” South, it was legal to have “separate but equal” facilities for blacks and whites. (Photo courtesy of Library of Congress/Wikimedia Commons)

De facto segregation, however, cannot be abolished by any court mandate. Segregation is still alive and well in the United States, with different racial or ethnic groups often segregated by neighborhood, borough, or parish. Sociologists use segregation indices to measure racial segregation of different races in different areas. The indices employ a scale from zero to 100, where zero is the most integrated and 100 is the least. In the New York metropolitan area, for instance, the black-white segregation index was 79 for the years 2005–2009. This means that 79 percent of either blacks or whites would have to move in order for each neighborhood to have the same racial balance as the whole metro region (Population Studies Center 2010).

Pluralism

Pluralism is represented by the ideal of the United States as a “salad bowl”: a great mixture of different cultures where each culture retains its own identity and yet adds to the flavor of the whole. True pluralism is characterized by mutual respect on the part of all cultures, both dominant

and subordinate, creating a multicultural environment of acceptance. In reality, true pluralism is a difficult goal to reach. In the United States, the mutual respect required by pluralism is often missing, and the nation's past pluralist model of a melting pot posits a society where cultural differences aren't embraced as much as erased.

Assimilation

Assimilation describes the process by which a minority individual or group gives up its own identity by taking on the characteristics of the dominant culture. In the United States, which has a history of welcoming and absorbing immigrants from different lands, assimilation has been a function of immigration.



For many immigrants to the United States, the Statue of Liberty is a symbol of freedom and a new life. Unfortunately, many immigrants have

encountered prejudice
and discrimination.
(Photo courtesy of Mark
Heard/flickr)

Most Americans have immigrant ancestors. In relatively recent history, between 1890 and 1920, the United States became home to around 24 million immigrants. In the decades since then, further waves of immigrants have come to these shores and have eventually been absorbed into American culture, sometimes after facing extended periods of prejudice and discrimination. Assimilation may lead to the loss of the minority group's cultural identity as they become absorbed into the dominant culture, but assimilation has minimal to no impact on the majority group's cultural identity.

Some groups may keep only symbolic gestures of their original ethnicity. For instance, many Irish Americans may celebrate Saint Patrick's Day, many Hindu Americans enjoy a Diwali festival, and many Mexican Americans may celebrate *Cinco de Mayo* (a May 5th commemoration of Mexican independence and heritage). However, for the rest of the year, other aspects of their originating culture may be forgotten.

Assimilation is antithetical to the "salad bowl" created by pluralism; rather than maintaining their own cultural flavor, subordinate cultures give up their own traditions in order to conform to their new environment. Sociologists measure the degree to which immigrants have assimilated to a new culture with four benchmarks: socioeconomic status, spatial concentration, language assimilation, and intermarriage. When faced with racial and ethnic discrimination, it can be difficult for new immigrants to fully assimilate. Language assimilation, in particular, can be a formidable barrier, limiting employment and educational options and therefore constraining growth in socioeconomic status.

Amalgamation

Amalgamation is the process by which a minority group and a majority group combine to form a new group. Amalgamation creates the classic “melting pot” analogy; unlike the “salad bowl,” in which each culture retains its individuality, the “melting pot” ideal sees the combination of cultures resulting in a new culture entirely.

Amalgamation, also known as miscegenation, is achieved through intermarriage between races. In the United States, anti-miscegenation laws flourished in the South during the Jim Crow era. It wasn't until 1967's *Loving v. Virginia* that the last antimiscegenation law was struck from the books, making these laws unconstitutional.

Summary

Intergroup relations range from a tolerant approach of pluralism to intolerance as severe as genocide. In pluralism, groups retain their own identity. In assimilation, groups conform to the identity of the dominant group. In amalgamation, groups combine to form a new group identity.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: Which intergroup relation displays the least tolerance?

- a. Segregation
- b. Assimilation
- c. Genocide
- d. Expulsion

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem: What doctrine justified legal segregation in the South?

- a. Jim Crow
 - b. *Plessey v. Ferguson*
 - c. De jure
 - d. Separate but equal
-

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

What intergroup relationship is represented by the “salad bowl” metaphor?

- a. Assimilation
 - b. Pluralism
 - c. Amalgamation
 - d. Segregation
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Amalgamation is represented by the _____ metaphor.

- a. melting pot
- b. Statue of Liberty

- c. salad bowl
 - d. separate but equal
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Do you believe immigration laws should foster an approach of pluralism, assimilation, or amalgamation? Which perspective do you think is most supported by current U.S. immigration policies?

Exercise:

Problem:

Which intergroup relation do you think is the most beneficial to the subordinate group? To society as a whole? Why?

Further Research

So you think you know your own assumptions? Check and find out with the Implicit Association Test:

http://openstaxcollege.org/l/implicit_association_test

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Glossary

amalgamation

the process by which a minority group and a majority group combine to form a new group

assimilation

the process by which a minority individual or group takes on the characteristics of the dominant culture

expulsion

when a dominant group forces a subordinate group to leave a certain area or even the country

genocide

the deliberate annihilation of a targeted (usually subordinate) group

pluralism

represented by the ideal of the United States as a "salad bowl:" a mixture of different cultures where each culture retains its own identity and yet adds to the "flavor" of the whole

segregation

the physical separation of two groups, particularly in residence, but also in workplace and social functions

Race and Ethnicity in the United States

- Compare and contrast the different experiences of various ethnic groups in the United States
- Apply theories of intergroup relations and race and ethnicity to different subordinate groups

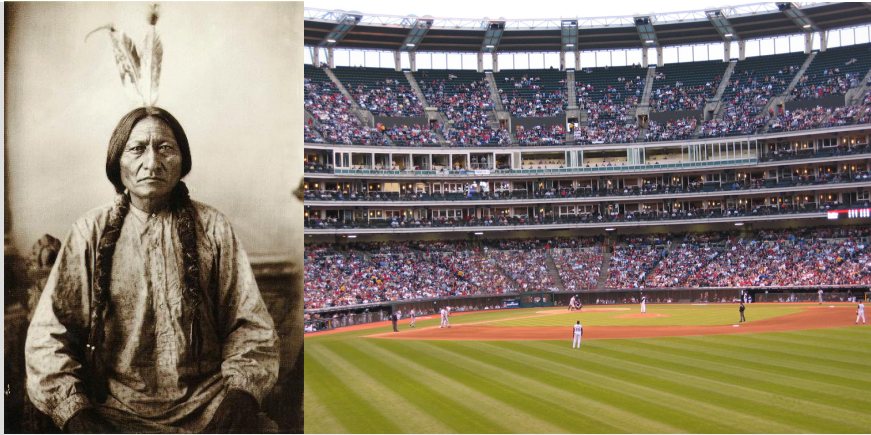
When colonists came to the New World, they found a land that did not need “discovering” since it was already occupied. While the first wave of immigrants came from Western Europe, eventually the bulk of people entering North America were from Northern Europe, then Eastern Europe, then Latin America and Asia. And let us not forget the forced immigration of African slaves. Most of these groups underwent a period of disenfranchisement in which they were relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy before they managed (for those who could) to achieve social mobility. Today, our society is multicultural, although the extent to which this multiculturalism is embraced varies, and the many manifestations of multiculturalism carry significant political repercussions. The sections below will describe how several groups became part of American society, discuss the history of intergroup relations for each faction, and assess each group’s status today.

Native Americans

The only nonimmigrant ethnic group in the United States, Native Americans were once a large population but by 2010 made up only 0.9 percent of U.S. populace (U.S. Census 2010).

Note:

Sports Teams with Native American Names



Many Native Americans (and others) believe sports teams with names like the Indians, Braves, and Warriors perpetuate unwelcome stereotypes. (Photo (a) courtesy of public domain/Wikimedia Commons; Photo (b) courtesy of Chris Brown/flickr)

The sports world abounds with team names like the Indians, the Warriors, the Braves, and even the Savages and Redskins. These names arise from historically prejudiced views of Native Americans as fierce, brave, and strong savages: attributes that would be beneficial to a sports team, but are not necessarily beneficial to Americans who should be seen as more than just fierce savages.

Since the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) has been campaigning against the use of such mascots, asserting that the “warrior savage myth . . . reinforces the racist view that Indians are uncivilized and uneducated and it has been used to justify policies of forced assimilation and destruction of Indian culture” (NCAI Resolution #TUL-05-087 2005). The campaign has met with only limited success. While some teams have changed their names, hundreds of professional, college, and K–12 school teams still have names derived from this stereotype. Another group, American Indian Cultural Support (AICS), is especially concerned with such names at K-12 schools, grades where children should be gaining a fuller and more realistic understanding of Native Americans than such stereotypes supply.

What do you think about such names? Should they be allowed or banned? What argument would a symbolic interactionist make on this topic?

How and Why They Came

The earliest immigrants to America arrived millennia before European immigrants. Dates of the migration are debated with estimates ranging from between 45,000 and 12,000 BCE. It is thought that early Indians migrated to this new land in search of big game to hunt, which they found in huge herds of grazing herbivores in the Americas. Over the centuries and then the millennia, Native American culture blossomed into an intricate web of hundreds of interconnected tribes, each with its own customs, traditions, languages, and religions.

History of Intergroup Relations

Native American culture prior to European settlement is referred to as Pre-Columbian: that is, prior to the coming of Christopher Columbus in 1492. Mistakenly believing that he had landed in the East Indies, Columbus named the indigenous people “Indians:” a name that has persisted for centuries despite it being a geographical misnomer used to homogenously label over 500 distinct people groups who have their own languages and traditions.

The history of intergroup relations between European colonists and Native Americans is a brutal one that most Americans are familiar with. As discussed in the section on genocide, the effect of European settlement of the Americas was to nearly destroy the indigenous population. And although Native Americans’ lack of immunity to European diseases caused the most deaths, overt mistreatment of Native Americans by Europeans was equally devastating.

From the first Spanish colonists to the French, English, and Dutch who followed, European settlers took what land they wanted, expanding across

the continent at will. If indigenous people tried to retain their stewardship of the land, Europeans fought them off with superior weapons. A key element of this issue is the indigenous view of land and land ownership. Most tribes considered the earth a living entity whose resources they were stewards of, the concepts of land ownership and conquest didn't exist in Native American society. Europeans' domination of the Americas was indeed a conquest; one scholar points out that Native Americans are the only minority group in the United States whose subordination occurred purely through conquest by the dominant group (Marger 1993).

After the establishment of the United States government, discrimination against Native Americans was codified and formalized in a series of laws intended to subjugate them and keep them from gaining any power. Some of the most impactful laws are as follows:

- The Indian Removal Act of 1830 forced the relocation of any native tribes east of the Mississippi River to lands west of the river.
- The Indian Appropriation Acts funded further removals and declared that no Indian tribe could be recognized as an independent nation, tribe, or power with which the American government would have to make treaties. This made it even easier for the U.S. government to take land it wanted.
- The Dawes Act of 1887 reversed the policy of isolating Native Americans on reservations, instead forcing them onto individual properties that were intermingled with white settlers, thereby reducing their capacity for power as a group.

Native American culture was further eroded by the establishment of Indian boarding schools in the late 19th century. These schools, run by both Christian missionaries and the United States government, had the express purpose of "civilizing" Native American children and assimilating them into white society. The boarding schools were located off-reservation to ensure that children were separated from their families and culture. Schools forced children to cut their hair, speak English, and practice Christianity. Physical and sexual abuses were rampant for decades; only in 1987 did the Bureau of Indian Affairs issue a policy on sexual abuse in boarding schools. Some scholars argue that many of the problems that Native Americans face

today result from almost a century of mistreatment at these boarding schools.

Current Status

The eradication of Native American culture continued until the 1960s, when Native Americans were able to participate in and benefit from the civil rights movement. The Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 guaranteed Indian tribes most of the rights of the United States Bill of Rights. New laws like the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 and the Education Assistance Act of the same year recognized tribal governments and gave them more power. Indian boarding schools have dwindled to only a few, and Native American cultural groups are striving to preserve and maintain old traditions to keep them from being lost forever.

However, Native Americans (some of whom now wished to be called American Indians so as to avoid the “savage” connotations of the term “native”) still suffer the effects of centuries of degradation. Long-term poverty, inadequate education, cultural dislocation, and high rates of unemployment contribute to Native American populations falling to the bottom of the economic spectrum. Native Americans also suffer disproportionately with lower life expectancies than most groups in the United States.

African Americans

As discussed in the section on race, the term African American can be a misnomer for many individuals. Many people with dark skin may have their more recent roots in Europe or the Caribbean, seeing themselves as Dominican American or Dutch American. Further, actual immigrants from Africa may feel that they have more of a claim to the term African American than those who are many generations removed from ancestors who originally came to this country. This section will focus on the experience of the slaves who were transported from Africa to the United States, and their progeny.

How and Why They Came

If Native Americans are the only minority group whose subordinate status occurred by conquest, African Americans are the exemplar minority group in the United States whose ancestors did not come here by choice. A Dutch sea captain brought the first Africans to the Virginia colony of Jamestown in 1619 and sold them as indentured servants. This was not an uncommon practice for either blacks or whites, and indentured servants were in high demand. For the next century, black and white indentured servants worked side by side. But the growing agricultural economy demanded greater and cheaper labor, and by 1705, Virginia passed the slave codes declaring that any foreign-born non-Christian could be a slave, and that slaves were considered property.

The next 150 years saw the rise of American slavery, with black Africans being kidnapped from their own lands and shipped to the New World on the trans-Atlantic journey known as the Middle Passage. Once in the Americas, the black population grew until American-born blacks outnumbered those born in Africa. But colonial (and later, American) slave codes declared that the child of a slave was a slave, so the slave class was created. By 1869, the slave trade was internal in the United States, with slaves being bought and sold across state lines like livestock.

History of Intergroup Relations

There is no starker illustration of the dominant-subordinate group relationship than that of slavery. In order to justify their severely discriminatory behavior, slaveholders and their supporters had to view blacks as innately inferior. Slaves were denied even the most basic rights of citizenship, a crucial factor for slaveholders and their supporters. Slavery poses an excellent example of conflict theory's perspective on race relations; the dominant group needed complete control over the subordinate group in order to maintain its power. Whippings, executions, rapes, denial of schooling and health care were all permissible and widely practiced.

Slavery eventually became an issue over which the nation divided into geographically and ideologically distinct factions, leading to the Civil War. And while the abolition of slavery on moral grounds was certainly a catalyst to war, it was not the only driving force. Students of American history will know that the institution of slavery was crucial to the Southern economy, whose production of crops like rice, cotton, and tobacco relied on the virtually limitless and cheap labor that slavery provided. In contrast, the North didn't benefit economically from slavery, resulting in an economic disparity tied to racial/political issues.

A century later, the civil rights movement was characterized by boycotts, marches, sit-ins, and freedom rides: demonstrations by a subordinate group that would no longer willingly submit to domination. The major blow to America's formally institutionalized racism was the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This Act, which is still followed today, banned discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Some sociologists, however, would argue that institutionalized racism persists.

Current Status

Although government-sponsored, formalized discrimination against African Americans has been outlawed, true equality does not yet exist. The National Urban League's *2011 Equality Index* reports that blacks' overall equality level with whites has dropped in the past year, from 71.5 percent to 71.1 percent in 2010. The *Index*, which has been published since 2005, notes a growing trend of increased inequality with whites, especially in the areas of unemployment, insurance coverage, and incarceration. Blacks also trail whites considerably in the areas of economics, health, and education.

To what degree do racism and prejudice contribute to this continued inequality? The answer is complex. 2008 saw the election of this country's first African American president: Barack Hussein Obama. Despite being popularly identified as black, we should note that President Obama is of a mixed background that is equally white, and although all presidents have been publicly mocked at times (Gerald Ford was depicted as a klutz, Bill Clinton as someone who could not control his libido), a startling percentage

of the critiques of Obama have been based on his race. The most blatant of these was the controversy over his birth certificate, where the “birther” movement questioned his citizenship and right to hold office. Although blacks have come a long way from slavery, the echoes of centuries of disempowerment are still evident.

Asian Americans

Like many groups this section discusses, Asian Americans represent a great diversity of cultures and backgrounds. The experience of a Japanese American whose family has been in the United States for three generations will be drastically different from a Laotian American who has only been in the U.S. for a few years. This section primarily discusses Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese immigrants and shows the differences between their experiences.

How and Why They Came

The national and ethnic diversity of Asian American immigration history is reflected in the variety of their experiences in joining American society. Asian immigrants have come to the United States in waves, at different times, and for different reasons.

The first Asian immigrants to come to the United States in the mid-19th century were Chinese. These immigrants were primarily men whose intention was to work for several years in order to earn incomes to support their families in China. Their main destination was the American West, where the Gold Rush was drawing people with its lure of abundant money. The construction of the Transcontinental Railroad was underway at this time, and the Central Pacific section hired thousands of migrant Chinese men to complete the laying of rails across the rugged Sierra Nevada mountain range. Chinese men also engaged in other manual labor like mining and agricultural work. The work was grueling and underpaid, but like many immigrants, they persevered.

Japanese immigration began in the 1880s, on the heels of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Many Japanese immigrants came to Hawaii to participate in the sugar industry; others came to the mainland, especially to California. Unlike the Chinese, however, the Japanese had a strong government that negotiated with the United States government to ensure the well-being of their immigrants. Japanese men were able to bring their wives and families to the United States, and were thus able to produce second- and third-generation Japanese Americans more quickly than their Chinese counterparts.

The most recent large-scale Asian immigration came from Korea and Vietnam and largely took place during the second half of the 20th century. While Korean immigration has been fairly gradual, Vietnamese immigration occurred primarily post-1975, after the fall of Saigon and the establishment of restrictive communist policies in Vietnam. Whereas many Asian immigrants came to the United States to seek better economic opportunities, Vietnamese immigrants came as political refugees, seeking asylum from harsh conditions in their homeland. The Refugee Act of 1980 helped them to find a place to settle in the United States.



Thirty-five
Vietnamese
refugees wait to
be taken aboard
the amphibious

USS *Blue Ridge*
(LCC-19). They
are being
rescued from a
35-foot fishing
boat 350 miles
northeast of
Cam Ranh Bay,
Vietnam, after
spending eight
days at sea.
(Photo courtesy
of U.S.
Navy/Wikimedi
a Commons)

History of Intergroup Relations

Chinese immigration came to an abrupt end with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This act was a result of anti-Chinese sentiment burgeoned by a depressed economy and loss of jobs. White workers blamed Chinese migrants for taking jobs, and the passage of the Act meant the number of Chinese workers decreased. Chinese men did not have the funds to return to China or to bring their families to America, so they remained physically and culturally segregated in the Chinatowns of large cities. Later legislation, the Immigration Act of 1924, further curtailed Chinese immigration. The Act included the race-based National Origins Act, which was aimed at keeping American ethnic stock as undiluted as possible by reducing “undesirable” immigrants. It was not until after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that Chinese immigration again increased and many Chinese families were reunited.

Although Japanese Americans have deep, long-reaching roots in the U.S., their history here has not always been smooth. The California Alien Land

Law of 1913 was aimed at them and other Asian immigrants, and it prohibited aliens from owning land. An even uglier action was the Japanese internment camps of World War II, discussed earlier as an illustration of expulsion.

Current Status

Asian Americans certainly have been subject to their share of racial prejudice, despite the seemingly positive stereotype as the model minority. The **model minority** stereotype is applied to a minority group that is seen as reaching significant educational, professional, and socioeconomic levels without challenging the existing establishment.

This stereotype is typically applied to Asian groups in the United States, and it can result in unrealistic expectations, putting a stigma on members of this group that do not meet the expectations. Stereotyping all Asians as smart and capable can also lead to a lack of much-needed government assistance and to educational and professional discrimination.

Hispanic Americans

Like the individuals comprising many “groups,” Hispanic Americans have a wide range of backgrounds and nationalities. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, about 75 percent of the respondents who identify as Hispanic report being of Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban origin. Of the total Hispanic group, 60 percent reported as Mexican, 44 percent reported as Cuban, and nine percent reported as Puerto Rican. Remember that the U.S. Census allows people to report as being more than one ethnicity.

Not only are there wide differences among the different origins that make up the Hispanic American population, there are also different names for the group itself. The 2010 U.S. Census states that “Hispanic” or “Latino” refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.” There have been some disagreements over whether Hispanic or Latino is the correct term for a group this diverse, and whether it would be better for people to refer to

themselves as being of their origin specifically, for example, Mexican American or Dominican American. This section will compare the experiences of Mexican Americans and Cuban Americans.

How and Why They Came

Mexican Americans form the largest Hispanic subgroup and also the oldest. Mexican migration to the United States started in the early 1900s in response to the need for cheap agricultural labor. Mexican migration was often circular; workers would stay for a few years, and then go back to Mexico with more money than they could have made in their country of origin. The length of Mexico's shared border with the United States has made immigration easier than for many other immigrant groups.

Cuban Americans are the second-largest Hispanic subgroup, and their history is quite different from that of Mexican Americans. The main wave of Cuban immigration to the United States started after Fidel Castro came to power in 1959 and reached its crest with the Mariel boatlift in 1980. Castro's Cuban Revolution ushered in an era of communism that continues to this day. To avoid having their assets seized by the government, many wealthy and educated Cubans migrated north, generally to the Miami area.

History of Intergroup Relations

For several decades, Mexican workers crossed the long border into America, both legally and illegally, to work in the fields that provided produce for the developing United States. Western growers needed a steady supply of labor, and the 1940s and 1950s saw the official federal Bracero Program (*bracero* is Spanish for *strong-arm*) that offered protection to Mexican guest workers. Interestingly, 1954 also saw the enactment of "Operation Wetback," which deported thousands of illegal Mexican workers. From these examples, we can see that the U.S. treatment of immigration from Mexico has been ambivalent at best.

Sociologist Douglas Massey (2006) suggests that although the average standard of living in Mexico may be lower in the United States, it is not so low as to make permanent migration the goal of most Mexicans. However, the strengthening of the border that began with 1986's Immigration Reform and Control Act has made one-way migration the rule for most Mexicans. Massey argues that the rise of illegal one-way immigration of Mexicans is a direct outcome of the law that was intended to reduce it.

Cuban Americans, perhaps because of their relative wealth and education level at the time of immigration, have fared better than many immigrants. Further, because they were fleeing a Communist country, they were given refugee status and offered protection and social services. The Cuban Migration Agreement of 1995 has curtailed legal immigration from Cuba, leading many Cubans to try to immigrate illegally by boat. According to a 2009 report from the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. government applies a "wet foot/dry foot" policy toward Cuban immigrants; Cubans who are intercepted while still at sea will be returned to Cuba, while those who reach the shore will be permitted to stay in the United States.

Current Status

Mexican Americans, especially those who are here illegally, are at the center of a national debate about immigration. Myers (2007) observes that no other minority group (except the Chinese) has immigrated to the United States in such an environment of illegality. He notes that in some years, three times as many Mexican immigrants may have entered the United States illegally as those who arrived legally. It should be noted that this is due to enormous disparity of economic opportunity on two sides of an open border, not because of any inherent inclination to break laws. In his report, "Measuring Immigrant Assimilation in the United States," Jacob Vigdor (2008) states that Mexican immigrants experience relatively low rates of economic and civic assimilation. He further suggests that "the slow rates of economic and civic assimilation set Mexicans apart from other immigrants, and may reflect the fact that the large numbers of Mexican immigrants residing in the United States illegally have few opportunities to advance themselves along these dimensions."

By contrast, Cuban Americans are often seen as a model minority group within the larger Hispanic group. Many Cubans had higher socioeconomic status when they arrived in this country, and their anti-Communist agenda has made them welcome refugees to this country. In south Florida, especially, Cuban Americans are active in local politics and professional life. As with Asian Americans, however, being a model minority can mask the issue of powerlessness that these minority groups face in U.S. society.

Note:

Arizona's Senate Bill 1070



Protesters in Arizona dispute the harsh new anti-immigration law. (Photo courtesy of rprathap/flickr)

As both legal and illegal immigrants, and with high population numbers, Mexican Americans are often the target of stereotyping, racism, and discrimination. A harsh example of this is in Arizona, where a new stringent immigration law—known as SB 1070 (for Senate Bill 1070)—has caused a nationwide controversy. The law requires that during a lawful stop, detention, or arrest, Arizona police officers must establish the immigration status of anyone they suspect may be here illegally. The law makes it a crime for individuals to fail to have documents confirming their legal status, and it gives police officers the right to detain people they suspect may be in the country illegally.

To many, the most troublesome aspect of this law is the latitude it affords police officers in terms of whose citizenship they may question. Having “reasonable suspicion that the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States” is reason enough to demand immigration papers (Senate Bill 1070 2010). Critics say this law will encourage racial profiling (the illegal practice of law enforcement using race as a basis for suspecting someone of a crime), making it hazardous to be caught “Driving While Brown,” a takeoff on the legal term Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) or the slang reference of “Driving While Black.” Driving While Brown refers to the likelihood of getting pulled over just for being nonwhite. SB 1070 has been the subject of many lawsuits, from parties as diverse as Arizona police officers, the American Civil Liberties Union, and even the federal government, which is suing on the basis of Arizona contradicting federal immigration laws (ACLU 2011). The future of SB 1070 is uncertain, but many other states have tried or are trying to pass similar measures. Do you think such measures are appropriate?

Arab Americans

If ever a category was hard to define, the various groups lumped under the name “Arab American” is it. After all, Hispanic Americans or Asian Americans are so designated because of their countries of origin. But for Arab Americans, their country of origin—Arabia—has not existed for centuries. In addition, Arab Americans represent all religious practices, despite there being a stereotype of them as Islamic. As Myers (2007) asserts, not all Arabs are Muslim, and not all Muslims are Arab, complicating the stereotype of what it means to be an Arab American. Geographically, the Arab region comprises the Middle East and parts of northern Africa. People whose ancestry lies in that area or who speak primarily Arabic may consider themselves Arabs.

The U.S. Census has struggled with the issue of Arab identity. The 2010 Census, as in previous years, did not offer an “Arab” box to check under the question of race. Individuals who want to be counted as Arabs had to check the box for “Some other race” and then write in their race. However, when

the Census data is tallied, they will be marked as white. This is problematic, however, denying Arab Americans opportunities for federal assistance.

Why They Came

The first Arab immigrants came to this country in the late 19th and early 20th century. They were predominantly Syrian, Lebanese, and Jordanian Christians, and they came to escape persecution and to make a better life. These early immigrants and their descendants, who were more likely to think of themselves as Syrian or Lebanese than Arab, represent almost half of the Arab American population today (Myers 2007). Restrictive immigration policies from the 1920s until 1965 curtailed all immigration, but Arab immigration since 1965 has been steady. Immigrants from this time period have been more likely to be Muslim and more highly educated, escaping political unrest and looking for better opportunities.

History of Intergroup Relations

Relations between Arab Americans and the dominant majority have been marked by mistrust, misinformation, and deeply entrenched beliefs. Helen Samhan of the Arab American Institute suggests that Arab-Israeli conflicts in the 1970s contributed significantly to cultural and political anti-Arab sentiment in the United States (2001). The United States has historically supported the State of Israel, while some Middle Eastern countries deny the existence of the Israeli state. Disputes over these issues have involved Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine.

As is often the case with stereotyping and prejudice, the actions of extremists come to define the entire group, regardless of the fact that most U.S. citizens with ties to the Middle Eastern community condemn terrorist actions, as do most inhabitants of the Middle East. Would it be fair to judge all Catholics by the events of the Inquisition? Of course, the United States was deeply affected by the events of September 11, 2001. This event has left a deep scar on the American psyche, and it has fortified anti-Arab

sentiment for a large percentage of Americans. In the first month after 9/11, hundreds of hate crimes were perpetrated against people who looked like they might be of Arab descent.

The proposed Park51 Muslim Community Center generated heated controversy due to its close proximity to Ground Zero. In these photos, people march in protest against the center, while counter-protesters demonstrate their support. (Photos (a) and (b) courtesy of David Shankbone/Wikimedia Commons)





Current Status

Although the rate of hate crimes against Arab Americans has slowed, Arab Americans are still victims of racism and prejudice. Racial profiling has proceeded against Arab Americans as a matter of course since 9/11. Particularly when engaged in air travel, being young and Arab-looking is enough to warrant a special search or detainment. This Islamophobia (irrational fear of or hatred against Muslims) does not show signs of abating. Scholars noted that white domestic terrorists like Timothy McVeigh, who detonated a bomb at an Oklahoma courthouse in 1995, have not inspired similar racial profiling or hate crimes against whites.

White Ethnic Americans

As we have seen, there is no minority group that fits easily in a category or that can be described simply. While sociologists believe that individual experiences can often be understood in light of their social characteristics (such as race, class, or gender), we must balance this perspective with awareness that no two individuals' experiences are alike. Making generalizations can lead to stereotypes and prejudice. The same is true for white ethnic Americans, who come from diverse backgrounds and have had a great variety of experiences. In this section, we will focus on German, Irish, Italian, and Eastern European immigrants.

Why They Came

White ethnic Europeans formed the second and third great waves of immigration, from the early 19th century to the mid-20th century. They joined a newly minted United States that was primarily made up of white Protestants from England. While most immigrants came searching for a better life, their experiences were not all the same.

The first major influx of European immigrants came from Germany and Ireland, starting in the 1820s. Germans came both for economic opportunity and to escape political unrest and military conscription, especially after the Revolutions of 1848. Many German immigrants of this period were political refugees: liberals who wanted to escape from an oppressive government. They were well-off enough to make their way inland, and they formed heavily German enclaves in the Midwest that exist to this day.

The Irish immigrants of the same time period were not always as well off financially, especially after the Irish Potato Famine of 1845. Irish immigrants settled mainly in the cities of the East Coast, where they were employed as laborers and where they faced significant discrimination.

German and Irish immigration continued into the late 19th century and earlier 20th century, at which point the numbers for Southern and Eastern European immigrants started growing as well. Italians, mainly from the Southern part of the country, began arriving in large numbers in the 1890s. Eastern European immigrants—people from Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, and Austria-Hungary—started arriving around the same time. Many of these Eastern Europeans were peasants forced into a hardscrabble existence in their native lands; political unrest, land shortages, and crop failures drove them to seek better opportunities in the United States. The Eastern European immigration wave also included Jewish people escaping pogroms (anti-Jewish uprisings) of Eastern Europe and the Pale of Settlement in what was then Poland and Russia.

History of Intergroup Relations

In a broad sense, German immigrants were not victimized to the same degree as many of the other subordinate groups this section discusses. While they may not have been welcomed with open arms, they were able to settle in enclaves and establish roots. A notable exception to this was during the lead up to World War I and through World War II, when anti-German sentiment was virulent.

Irish immigrants, many of whom were very poor, were more of an underclass than the Germans. In Ireland, the English had oppressed the Irish for centuries, eradicating their language and culture and discriminating against their religion (Catholicism). Although the Irish had a larger population than the English, they were a subordinate group. This dynamic reached into the new world, where Anglo Americans saw Irish immigrants as a race apart: dirty, lacking ambition, and suitable for only the most menial jobs. In fact, Irish immigrants were subject to criticism identical to that with which the dominant group characterized African Americans. By necessity, Irish immigrants formed tight communities segregated from their Anglo neighbors.

The later wave of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe was also subject to intense discrimination and prejudice. In particular, the dominant group—which now included second- and third-generation Germans and Irish—saw Italian immigrants as the dregs of Europe and worried about the purity of the American race (Myers 2007). Italian immigrants lived in segregated slums in Northeastern cities, and in some cases were even victims of violence and lynchings similar to what African Americans endured. They worked harder and were paid less than other workers, often doing the dangerous work that other laborers were reluctant to take on.

Current Status

The U.S. Census from 2008 shows that 16.5 percent of respondents reported being of German descent: the largest group in the country. For many years, German Americans endeavored to maintain a strong cultural identity, but they are now culturally assimilated into the dominant culture.

There are now more Irish Americans in the United States than there are Irish in Ireland. One of the country's largest cultural groups, Irish Americans have slowly achieved acceptance and assimilation into the dominant group.

Myers (2007) states that Italian Americans' cultural assimilation is "almost complete, but with remnants of ethnicity." The presence of "Little Italy" neighborhoods—originally segregated slums where Italians congregated in the 19th century—exist today. While tourists flock to the saints' festivals in Little Italies, most Italian Americans have moved to the suburbs at the same rate as other white groups.

Summary

The history of the American people contains an infinite variety of experiences that sociologists understand follow patterns. From the indigenous people who first inhabited these lands to the waves of immigrants over the past 500 years, migration is an experience with many shared characteristics. Most groups have experienced various degrees of prejudice and discrimination as they have gone through the process of assimilation.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

What makes Native Americans unique as a subordinate group in the United States?

- a. They are the only group that experienced expulsion.
- b. They are the only group that was segregated.
- c. They are the only group that was enslaved.
- d. They are the only group that did not come here as immigrants.

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

Which subordinate group is often referred to as the “model minority?”

- a. African Americans
- b. Asian Americans
- c. White ethnic Americans
- d. Native Americans

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Which federal act or program was designed to allow more Hispanic American immigration, not block it?

- a. The Bracero Program
- b. Immigration Reform and Control Act
- c. Operation Wetback
- d. SB 1070

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Many Arab Americans face _____, especially after 9/11.

- a. racism
 - b. segregation
 - c. Islamophobia
 - d. prejudice
-

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

Why did most white ethnic Americans come to the United States?

- a. For a better life
 - b. To escape oppression
 - c. Because they were forced out of their own countries
 - d. a and b only
-

Solution:

Answer

D

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

In your opinion, which group had the easiest time coming to this country? Which group had the hardest time? Why?

Exercise:**Problem:**

Which group has made the most socioeconomic gains? Why do you think that group has had more success than others?

Further Research

Are people interested in reclaiming their ethnic identities? Read this article and decide:

The White Ethnic Revival: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/ethnic_revival

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Glossary

model minority

the stereotype applied to a minority group that is seen as reaching higher educational, professional, and socioeconomic levels without protest against the majority establishment

Introduction to Education class="introduction"

Schools
teach us far
more than
reading,
writing, and
arithmetic.

They also
socialize us
to cultural
norms and
expectations

. (Photo
courtesy of
Editor
B/flickr)



From the moment a child is born, his or her education begins. At first, education is an informal process in which an infant watches others and imitates them. As the infant grows into a young child, the process of education becomes more formal through play dates and preschool. Once in grade school, academic lessons become the focus of education as a child moves through the school system. But even then, education is about much more than the simple learning of facts.

Our education system also socializes us to our society. We learn cultural expectations and norms, which are reinforced by our teachers, our textbooks, and our classmates. (For students outside the dominant culture, this aspect of the education system can pose significant challenges.) You might remember learning your multiplication tables in second grade and also learning the social rules of taking turns on the swings at recess. You might recall learning about the U.S. Constitution in an American Government course as well as learning when and how to speak up in class.

Schools also can be agents of change, teaching individuals to think outside of the family norms into which they were born. Educational environments

can broaden horizons and even help to break cycles of poverty and racism.

Of course, America's schools are often criticized—for not producing desired test results, or for letting certain kids slip through the cracks. In all, sociologists understand education to be both a social problem and a social solution—and a rich area of study.

Education around the World

- Identify differences in educational resources around the world
- Describe the concept of universal access to education



These children are at a library in Singapore, where students are outperforming U.S. students on worldwide tests. (Photo courtesy of kodomut/flickr)

Education is a social institution through which a society's children are taught basic academic knowledge, learning skills, and cultural norms. Every nation in the world is equipped with some form of education system, though those systems vary greatly. The major factors affecting education systems are the resources and money that are utilized to support those systems in different nations. As you might expect, a country's wealth has much to do with the amount of money spent on education. Countries that do not have such basic amenities as running water are unable to support robust education systems or, in many cases, any formal schooling at all. The result of this worldwide educational inequality is a social concern for many countries, including the United States.

International differences in education systems are not solely a financial issue. The value placed on education, the amount of time devoted to it, and the distribution of education within a country also play a role in those

differences. For example, students in South Korea spend 220 days a year in school, compared to the 180 days a year of their United States counterparts (Pellissier 2010). As of 2006, the United States ranked fifth among 27 countries for college participation, but ranked 16th in the number of students who receive college degrees (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2006). These statistics may be related to how much time is spent on education in the United States.

Then there is the issue of educational distribution within a nation. In December 2010, the results of a test called the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which is administered to 15-year-old students worldwide, were released. Those results showed that students in the United States had fallen from 15th to 25th in the rankings for science and math (National Public Radio 2010). Students at the top of the rankings hailed from Shanghai, Finland, Hong Kong, and Singapore.

Analysts determined that the nations and city-states at the top of the rankings had several things in common. For one, they had well-established standards for education with clear goals for all students. They also recruited teachers from the top 5 to 10 percent of university graduates each year, which is not the case for most countries (National Public Radio 2010).

Finally, there is the issue of social factors. One analyst from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the organization that created the test, attributed 20 percent of performance differences and the United States' low rankings to differences in social background. Researchers noted that educational resources, including money and quality teachers, are not distributed equitably in the United States. In the top-ranking countries, limited access to resources did not necessarily predict low performance. Analysts also noted what they described as "resilient students," or those students who achieve at a higher level than one might expect given their social background. In Shanghai and Singapore, the proportion of resilient students is about 70 percent. In the United States, it is below 30 percent. These insights suggest that the United States' educational system may be on a descending path that could detrimentally affect the country's economy and its social landscape (National Public Radio 2010).

Note:**Education in Afghanistan**

Since the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, there has been a spike in demand for education. This spike is so great, in fact, that it has exceeded the nation's resources for meeting the demand. More than 6.2 million students are enrolled in grades one through 12 in Afghanistan, and about 2.2 million of those students are female (World Bank 2011). Both of these figures are the largest in Afghan history—far exceeding the time before the Taliban was in power. At the same time, there is currently a severe shortage of teachers in Afghanistan, and the educators in the system are often undertrained and frequently do not get paid on time. Currently, they are optimistic and enthusiastic about educational opportunities and approach teaching with a positive attitude, but there is fear that this optimism will not last.

With these challenges, there is a push to improve the quality of education in Afghanistan as quickly as possible. Educational leaders are looking to other post-conflict countries for guidance, hoping to learn from other nations that have faced similar circumstances. Their input suggests that the keys to rebuilding education are an early focus on quality and a commitment to educational access. Currently, educational quality in Afghanistan is generally considered poor, as is educational access. Literacy and math skills are low, as are skills in critical thinking and problem solving.

Education of females poses additional challenges since cultural norms decree that female students should be taught by female teachers. Currently, there is a lack of female teachers to meet that gender-based demand. In some provinces, the female student population falls below 15 percent of students (World Bank 2011). Female education is also important to Afghanistan's future because mothers are primary socialization agents: an educated mother is more likely to instill a thirst for education in her children, setting up a positive cycle of education for generations to come. Improvements must be made to Afghanistan's infrastructure in order to improve education, which has historically been managed at the local level. The World Bank, which strives to help developing countries break free of poverty and become self-sustaining has been hard at work to assist the people of Afghanistan in improving educational quality and access. The Education Quality Improvement Program provides training for teachers

and grants to communities. The program is active in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, supporting grants for both quality enhancement and development of infrastructure as well as providing a teacher education program.

Another program called Strengthening Higher Education focuses on six universities in Afghanistan and four regional colleges. The emphasis of this program is on fostering relationships with universities in other countries, including the United States and India, to focus on fields including engineering, natural sciences, and English as a second language. The program also seeks to improve libraries and laboratories through grants.

These efforts by the World Bank illustrate the ways global attention and support can benefit an educational system. In developing countries like Afghanistan, partnerships with countries that have established successful educational programs play a key role in efforts to rebuild their future.



A student in Afghanistan heads to school. The ISAF logo on his backpack represents a NATO-led security mission that has been involved in

rebuilding
Afghanistan.
(Photo courtesy
of
isafmedia/flickr)

Formal and Informal Education

As already mentioned, education is not solely concerned with the basic academic concepts that a student learns in the classroom. Societies also educate their children, outside of the school system, in matters of everyday practical living. These two types of learning are referred to as formal education and informal education.

Formal education describes the learning of academic facts and concepts through a formal curriculum. Arising from the tutelage of ancient Greek thinkers, centuries of scholars have examined topics through formalized methods of learning. Education in earlier times was only available to the higher classes; they had the means for access to scholarly materials, plus the luxury of leisure time that could be used for learning. The Industrial Revolution and its accompanying social changes made education more accessible to the general population. Many families in the emerging middle class found new opportunities for schooling.

The modern U.S. educational system is the result of this progression. Today, basic education is considered a right and responsibility for all citizens. Expectations of this system focus on formal education, with curricula and testing designed to ensure that students learn the facts and concepts that society believes are basic knowledge.

In contrast, **informal education** describes learning about cultural values, norms, and expected behaviors by participating in a society. This type of learning occurs both through the formal education system and at home. Our earliest learning experiences generally happen via parents, relatives, and

others in our community. Through informal education, we learn how to dress for different occasions, how to perform regular life routines like shopping for and preparing food, and how to keep our bodies clean.



Parents teaching their children to cook provide an informal education.

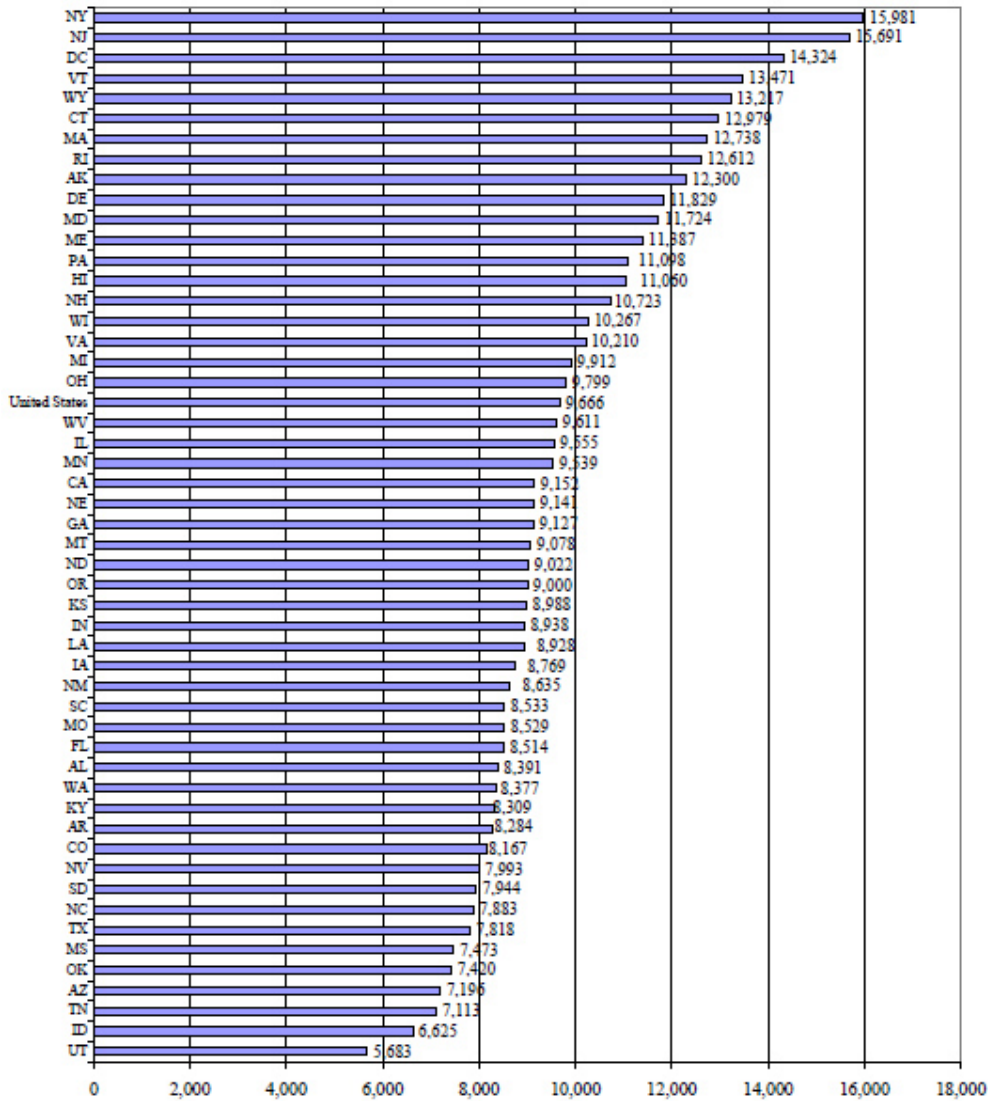
(Photo courtesy of eyeliam/flickr)

Cultural transmission refers to the way people come to learn the values, beliefs, and social norms of their culture. Both informal and formal education include cultural transmission. For example, a student will learn about cultural aspects of modern history in a U.S. History classroom. In that same classroom, the student might learn the cultural norm for asking a classmate out on a date through passing notes and whispered conversations.

Access to Education

Another global concern in education is **universal access**. This term refers to people's equal ability to participate in an education system. On a world level, access might be more difficult for certain groups based on class or gender (as was the case in the United States earlier in our nation's history, a dynamic we still struggle to overcome). The modern idea of universal access arose in the United States as a concern for people with disabilities. In the United States, one way in which universal education is supported is through federal and state governments covering the cost of free public education. Of course, the way this plays out in terms of school budgets and taxes makes this an often-contested topic on the national, state, and community levels.

Figure 4. Elementary-Secondary Per Pupil Current Spending Amounts by State:
2006-07



SOURCE: 2007 Census of Governments Survey of Local Government Finances - School Systems. Data are not subject to sampling error, but for information on nonsampling error and definitions, see the Introduction. Data users who create their own estimates from these tables should cite the U.S. Census Bureau as the source of the original data only.

Per-student spending varies greatly by state, with the highest-ranking U.S. states spending up to three times what the lowest-ranking states spend per student. How has your state's per-student spending affected your educational opportunities? (Graph courtesy of *the New York Times* Economix Blog and the U.S. Census Bureau 2007)

A precedent for universal access to education in the United States was set with the 1972 U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia's decision in *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia*. This case was brought on the behalf of seven school-age children with special needs who argued that the school board was denying their access to free public education. The school board maintained that the children's "exceptional" needs, which included mental retardation and mental illness, precluded their right to be educated for free in a public school setting. The board argued that the cost of educating these children would be too expensive and that the children would therefore have to remain at home without access to education.

This case was resolved in a hearing without any trial. The judge, Joseph Cornelius Waddy, upheld the students' right to education, finding that they were to be given either public education services or private education paid for by the Washington, D.C., board of education. He noted that

Constitutional rights must be afforded citizens despite the greater expense involved ... the District of Columbia's interest in educating the excluded children clearly must outweigh its interest in preserving its financial resources. ... The inadequacies of the District of Columbia Public School System whether occasioned by insufficient funding or administrative inefficiency, certainly cannot be permitted to bear more heavily on the "exceptional" or handicapped child than on the normal child (*Mills v. Board of Education* 1972).

Today, the optimal way to include differently able students in standard classrooms is still being researched and debated. "Inclusion" is a method that involves complete immersion in a standard classroom, whereas "mainstreaming" balances time in a special-needs classroom with standard classroom participation. There continues to be social debate surrounding how to implement the ideal of universal access to education.

Summary

Educational systems around the world have many differences, though the same factors—including resources and money—affect every educational system. Educational distribution is a major issue in many nations, including in the United States, where the amount of money spent per student varies greatly by state. Education happens through both formal and informal systems; both foster cultural transmission. Universal access to education is a worldwide concern.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

What are the major factors affecting education systems throughout the world?

- a. Resources and money
- b. Student interest
- c. Teacher interest
- d. Transportation

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

What do nations that are top-ranked in science and math have in common?

- a. They are all in Asia.
- b. They recruit top teachers.

- c. They spend more money per student.
 - d. They use cutting-edge technology in classrooms.
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem: Informal education _____.

- a. describes when students teach their peers
 - b. refers to the learning of cultural norms
 - c. only takes place at home
 - d. relies on a planned instructional process
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Learning from classmates that most students buy lunch on Fridays is an example of _____.

- a. cultural transmission
 - b. educational access
 - c. formal education
 - d. informal education
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

The 1972 case *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* set a precedent for _____.

- a. access to education
- b. average spending on students
- c. desegregation of schools
- d. teacher salary

Solution:

Answer

A

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Has there ever been a time when your formal and informal educations in the same setting were at odds? How did you overcome that disconnect?

Exercise:

Problem:

Do you believe free access to schools has achieved its intended goal? Explain.

Further Research

Though it's a struggle, education is continually being improved in the developing world. To learn how educational programs are being fostered worldwide, explore the Education section of the Center for Global Development's website:

http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center_global_development

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Glossary

cultural transmission

the way people come to learn the values, beliefs, and social norms of their culture

education

a social institution through which a society's children are taught basic academic knowledge, learning skills, and cultural norms

formal education

the learning of academic facts and concepts

informal education

learning about cultural values, norms, and expected behaviors through participation in a society

universal access

the equal ability of all people to participate in an education system

Theoretical Perspectives on Education

- Define manifest and latent functions of education
- Explain and discuss how functionalism, conflict theory, feminism, and interactionism view issues of education

While it is clear that education plays an integral role in individuals' lives as well as society as a whole, sociologists view that role from many diverse points of view. Functionalists believe that education equips people to perform different functional roles in society. Conflict theorists view education as a means of widening the gap in social inequality. Feminist theorists point to evidence that sexism in education continues to prevent women from achieving a full measure of social equality. Symbolic interactionists study the dynamics of the classroom, the interactions between students and teachers, and how those affect everyday life. In this section, you will learn about each of these perspectives.

Functionalism

Functionalists view education as one of the more important social institutions in a society. They contend that education contributes two kinds of functions: manifest (or primary) functions, which are the intended and visible functions of education; and latent (or secondary) functions, which are the hidden and unintended functions.

Manifest Functions

There are several major manifest functions associated with education. The first is socialization. Beginning in preschool and kindergarten, students are taught to practice various societal roles. The French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), who established the academic discipline of sociology, characterized schools as “socialization agencies that teach children how to get along with others and prepare them for adult economic roles” (Durkheim 1898). Indeed, it seems that schools have taken on this responsibility in full.

This socialization also involves learning the rules and norms of the society as a whole. In the early days of compulsory education, students learned the dominant culture. Today, since the culture of the United States is increasingly diverse, students may learn a variety of cultural norms, not only that of the dominant culture.

School systems in the United States also transmit the core values of the nation through manifest functions like social control. One of the roles of schools is to teach students conformity to law and respect for authority. Obviously, such respect, given to teachers and administrators, will help a student navigate the school environment. This function also prepares students to enter the workplace and the world at large, where they will continue to be subject to people who have authority over them. Fulfillment of this function rests primarily with classroom teachers and instructors who are with students all day.



The teacher's authority in the classroom is a way in which education fulfills the manifest functions of social control.
(Photo courtesy of Tulane Public Relations/flickr)

Education also provides one of the major methods used by people for upward social mobility. This function is referred to as **social placement**. College and graduate schools are viewed as vehicles for moving students closer to the careers that will give them the financial freedom and security they seek. As a result, college students are often more motivated to study areas that they believe will be advantageous on the social ladder. A student might value business courses over a class in Victorian poetry because she sees business class as a stronger vehicle for financial success.

Latent Functions

Education also fulfills latent functions. As you well know, much goes on in a school that has little to do with formal education. For example, you might notice an attractive fellow student when he gives a particularly interesting answer in class—catching up with him and making a date speaks to the latent function of courtship fulfilled by exposure to a peer group in the educational setting.

The educational setting introduces students to social networks that might last for years and can help people find jobs after their schooling is complete. Of course, with social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn, these networks are easier than ever to maintain. Another latent function is the ability to work with others in small groups, a skill that is transferable to a workplace and that might not be learned in a homeschool setting.

The educational system, especially as experienced on university campuses, has traditionally provided a place for students to learn about various social issues. There is ample opportunity for social and political advocacy, as well as the ability to develop tolerance to the many views represented on campus. In 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement swept across college campuses all over the United States, leading to demonstrations in which diverse groups of students were unified with the purpose of changing the political climate of the country.

Manifest Functions: Openly stated functions with intended goals	Latent Functions: Hidden, unstated functions with sometimes unintended consequences
Socialization	Courtship
Transmission of culture	Social networks
Social control	Working in groups
Social placement	Creation of generation gap
Cultural innovation	Political and social integration

Manifest and Latent Functions of Education According to functionalist theory, education contributes both manifest and latent functions.

Functionalists recognize other ways that schools educate and enculturate students. One of the most important American values students in the United States learn is that of individualism—the valuing of the individual over the value of groups or society as a whole. In countries such as Japan and China, where the good of the group is valued over the rights of the individual, students do not learn as they do in the United States that the highest rewards go to the “best” individual in academics as well as athletics. One of the roles of schools in the United States is fostering self-esteem; conversely, schools in Japan focus on fostering social esteem—the honoring of the group over the individual.

In the United States, schools also fill the role of preparing students for competition in life. Obviously, athletics foster a competitive nature, but even in the classroom students compete against one another academically. Schools also fill the role of teaching patriotism. Students recite the Pledge of Allegiance each morning and take history classes where they learn about national heroes and the nation’s past.



Starting each day with the Pledge of Allegiance is one way in which students are taught patriotism. (Photo courtesy of Jeff Turner/flickr)

Another role of schools, according to functionalist theory, is that of **sorting**, or classifying students based on academic merit or potential. The most capable students are identified early in schools through testing and classroom achievements. Such students are placed in accelerated programs in anticipation of successful college attendance.

Functionalists also contend that school, particularly in recent years, is taking over some of the functions that were traditionally undertaken by family. Society relies on schools to teach about human sexuality as well as basic skills such as budgeting and job applications—topics that at one time were addressed by the family.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theorists do not believe that public schools reduce social inequality. Rather, they believe that the educational system reinforces and perpetuates social inequalities arising from differences in class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Where functionalists see education as serving a beneficial role,

conflict theorists view it more negatively. To them, educational systems preserve the status quo and push people of lower status into obedience.



Conflict theorists see the education system as a means by which those in power stay in power. (Photo courtesy Thomas Ricker/flickr)

The fulfillment of one's education is closely linked to social class. Students of low socioeconomic status are generally not afforded the same opportunities as students of higher status, no matter how great their academic ability or desire to learn. Picture a student from a working-class home who wants to do well in school. On a Monday, he's assigned a paper that's due Friday. Monday evening, he has to babysit his younger sister while his divorced mother works. Tuesday and Wednesday, he works stocking shelves after school until 10:00 p.m. By Thursday, the only day he might have available to work on that assignment, he's so exhausted he can't bring himself to start the paper. His mother, though she'd like to help him, is so tired herself that she isn't able to give him the encouragement or support he needs. And since English is her second language, she has difficulty with some of his educational materials. They also lack a computer and printer at home, which most of his classmates have, so they have to rely on the public library or school system for access to technology. As this

story shows, many students from working class families have to contend with helping out at home, contributing financially to the family, poor study environments and a lack of support from their families. This is a difficult match with education systems that adhere to a traditional curriculum that is more easily understood and completed by students of higher social classes.

Such a situation leads to social class reproduction, extensively studied by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He researched how **cultural capital**, or cultural knowledge that serves (metaphorically) as currency that helps one navigate a culture, alters the experiences and opportunities available to French students from different social classes. Members of the upper and middle classes have more cultural capital than do families of lower class status. As a result, the educational system maintains a cycle in which the dominant culture's values are rewarded. Instruction and tests cater to the dominant culture and leave others struggling to identify with values and competencies outside their social class. For example, there has been a great deal of discussion over what standardized tests such as the SAT truly measure. Many argue that the tests group students by cultural ability rather than by natural intelligence.

The cycle of rewarding those who possess cultural capital is found in formal educational curricula as well as in the **hidden curriculum**, which refers to the type of nonacademic knowledge that one learns through informal learning and cultural transmission. This hidden curriculum reinforces the positions of those with higher cultural capital, and serves to bestow status unequally.

Conflict theorists point to **tracking**, a formalized sorting system that places students on "tracks" (advanced versus low achievers) that perpetuate inequalities. While educators may believe that students do better in tracked classes because they are with students of similar ability and may have access to more individual attention from teachers, conflict theorists feel that tracking leads to self-fulfilling prophecies in which students live up (or down) to teacher and societal expectations (Education Week 2004).

To conflict theorists, schools play the role of training working class students to accept and retain their position as lower members of society. They argue that this role is fulfilled through the disparity of resources available to

students in richer and poorer neighborhoods as well as through testing (Lauen and Tyson 2008).

IQ tests have been attacked for being biased—for testing cultural knowledge rather than actual intelligence. For example, a test item may ask students what instruments belong in an orchestra. To correctly answer this question requires certain cultural knowledge—knowledge most often held by more affluent people who typically have more exposure to orchestral music. Though experts in testing claim that bias has been eliminated from tests, conflict theorists maintain that this is impossible. These tests, to conflict theorists, are another way in which education does not provide opportunities, but instead maintains an established configuration of power.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory aims to understand the mechanisms and roots of gender inequality in education, as well as their societal repercussions. Like many other institutions of society, educational systems are characterized by unequal treatment and opportunity for women. Almost two-thirds of the world's 862 million illiterate people are women, and the illiteracy rate among women is expected to increase in many regions, especially in several African and Asian countries (UNESCO 2005; World Bank 2007).

Women in American have been relatively late, historically speaking, to be granted entry to the public university system. In fact, it wasn't until the establishment of Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972 that discriminating on the basis of sex in U.S. education programs became illegal. In the United States, there is also a post-education gender disparity between what male and female college graduates earn. A study released in May 2011 showed that, among men and women who graduated from college between 2006 and 2010, men out-earned women by an average of more than \$5,000 each year. First year job earnings for men averaged \$33,150; for women the average was \$28,000 (Godofsky, Zukin, and van Horn 2011). Similar trends are seen among salaries of professionals in virtually all industries.

When women face limited opportunities for education, their capacity to achieve equal rights, including financial independence, are limited. Feminist theory seeks to promote women's rights to equal education (and its resultant benefits) across the world.

Note:

Grade Inflation: When Is an A Really a C?

Consider a large-city newspaper publisher. Ten years ago, when culling résumés for an entry-level copywriter, they were well assured that if they selected a grad with a GPA of 3.7 or higher, they'd have someone with the writing skills to contribute to the workplace on day one. But over the last few years, they've noticed that A-level students don't have the competency evident in the past. More and more, they find themselves in the position of educating new hires in abilities that, in the past, had been mastered during their education.

This story illustrates a growing concern referred to as **grade inflation**—a term used to describe the observation that the correspondence between letter grades and the achievements they reflect has been changing (in a downward direction) over time. Put simply, what used to be considered C-level, or average, now often earns a student a B, or even an A.

Why is this happening? Research on this emerging issue is ongoing, so no one is quite sure yet. Some cite the alleged shift toward a culture that rewards effort instead of product, i.e., the amount of work a student puts in raises the grade, even if the resulting product is poor quality. Another oft-cited contributor is the pressure many of today's instructors feel to earn positive course evaluations from their students—records that can tie into teacher compensation, award of tenure, or the future career of a young grad teaching entry-level courses. The fact that these reviews are commonly posted online exacerbates this pressure.

Other studies don't agree that grade inflation exists at all. In any case, the issue is hotly debated, with many being called upon to conduct research to help us better understand and respond to this trend (National Public Radio 2004; Mansfield 2005).

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism sees education as one way labeling theory is seen in action. A symbolic interactionist might say that this labeling has a direct correlation to those who are in power and those who are being labeled. For example, low standardized test scores or poor performance in a particular class often lead to a student being labeled as a low achiever. Such labels are difficult to “shake off,” which can create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton 1968).

In his book *High School Confidential*, Jeremy Iverson details his experience as a Stanford graduate posing as a student at a California high school. One of the problems he identifies in his research is that of teachers applying labels that students are never able to lose. One teacher told him, without knowing he was a bright graduate of a top university, that he would never amount to anything (Iverson 2006). Iverson obviously didn’t take this teacher’s false assessment to heart. But when an actual 17-year-old student hears this from a person with authority over her, it’s no wonder that the student might begin to “live down to” that label.

The labeling with which symbolic interactionists concern themselves extends to the very degrees that symbolize completion of education. **Credentialism** embodies the emphasis on certificates or degrees to show that a person has a certain skill, has attained a certain level of education, or has met certain job qualifications. These certificates or degrees serve as a symbol of what a person has achieved, allowing the labeling of that individual.

Indeed, as these examples show, labeling theory can significantly impact a student’s schooling. This is easily seen in the educational setting, as teachers and more powerful social groups within the school dole out labels that are adopted by the entire school population.

Summary

The major sociological theories offer insight into how we understand education. Functionalists view education as an important social institution

that contributes both manifest and latent functions. Functionalists see education as serving the needs of society by preparing students for later roles, or functions, in society. Conflict theorists see schools as a means for perpetuating class, racial-ethnic, and gender inequalities. In the same vein, feminist theory focuses specifically on the mechanisms and roots of gender inequality in education. The theory of symbolic interactionism focuses on education as a means for labeling individuals.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem:

Which of the following is *not* a manifest function of education?

- a. Cultural innovation
- b. Courtship
- c. Social placement
- d. Socialization

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Because she plans on achieving success in marketing, Tammie is taking courses on managing social media. This is an example of _____.

- a. cultural innovation
- b. social control
- c. social placement
- d. socialization

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem:

Which theory of education focuses on the ways in which education maintains the status quo?

- a. Conflict theory
- b. Feminist theory
- c. Functionalist theory
- d. Symbolic interactionism

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem:

Which theory of education focuses on the labels acquired through the educational process?

- a. Conflict theory
- b. Feminist theory
- c. Functionalist theory
- d. Symbolic interactionism

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

What term describes the assignment of students to specific education programs and classes on the basis of test scores, previous grades, or perceived ability?

- a. Hidden curriculum
- b. Labeling
- c. Self-fulfilling prophecy
- d. Tracking

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

Functionalist theory sees education as serving the needs of _____.

- a. families
- b. society
- c. the individual
- d. all of the above

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

Rewarding students for meeting deadlines and respecting authority figures is an example of _____.

- a. a latent function
- b. a manifest function
- c. informal education
- d. transmission of moral education

Solution:

Answer

D

Exercise:

Problem:

What term describes the separation of students based on merit?

- a. Cultural transmission
- b. Social control
- c. Sorting
- d. Hidden curriculum

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem: Conflict theorists see sorting as a way to _____.

- a. challenge gifted students
- b. perpetuate divisions of socioeconomic status

- c. help students who need additional support
 - d. teach respect for authority
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem: Conflict theorists see IQ tests as being biased. Why?

- a. They are scored in a way that is subject to human error.
 - b. They do not give children with learning disabilities a fair chance to demonstrate their true intelligence.
 - c. They don't involve enough test items to cover multiple intelligences.
 - d. They reward affluent students with questions that assume knowledge associated with upper-class culture.
-

Solution:

Answer

D

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Thinking of your school, what are some ways that a conflict theorist would say that your school perpetuates class differences?

Exercise:

Problem:

Which sociological theory best describes your view of education?
Explain why.

Exercise:**Problem:**

Based on what you know about symbolic interactionism and feminist theory, what do you think proponents of those theories see as the role of the school?

Further Research

Can tracking actually improve learning? This 2009 article from *Education Next* explores the debate with evidence from Kenya.

http://openstaxcollege.org/l/education_next

The National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) is committed to ending the bias and other flaws seen in standardized testing. Their mission is to ensure that students, teachers, and schools are evaluated fairly. You can learn more about their mission, as well as the latest in news on test bias and fairness, at their website: http://openstaxcollege.org/l/fair_test

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Glossary

credentialism

the emphasis on certificates or degrees to show that a person has a certain skill, has attained a certain level of education, or has met certain job qualifications

cultural capital

cultural knowledge that serves (metaphorically) as currency to help one navigate a culture

grade inflation

the idea that the achievement level associated with an A today is notably lower than the achievement level associated with A-level work a few decades ago

hidden curriculum

the type of nonacademic knowledge that one learns through informal learning and cultural transmission

social placement

the use of education to improve one's social standing

sorting

classifying students based on academic merit or potential

tracking

a formalized sorting system that places students on "tracks" (advanced, low achievers) that perpetuate inequalities

Issues in Education

- Identify and discuss historical and contemporary issues in education

As schools strive to fill a variety of roles in their students' lives, many issues and challenges arise. Students walk a minefield of bullying, violence in schools, the results of declining funding, plus other problems that affect their education. When Americans are asked about their opinion of public education on the Gallup poll each year, reviews are mixed at best (Saad 2008). Schools are no longer merely a place for learning and socializing. With the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling in 1954, schools became a repository of much political and legal action that is at the heart of several issues in education.

Equal Education

Until the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, schools had operated under the precedent set by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, which allowed racial segregation in schools and private businesses (the case dealt specifically with railroads) and introduced the much maligned phrase "separate but equal" into the United States lexicon. The 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision overruled this, declaring that state laws that had established separate schools for black and white students were, in fact, unequal and unconstitutional.

While the ruling paved the way toward civil rights, it was also met with contention in many communities. In Arkansas in 1957, the governor mobilized the state National Guard to prevent black students from entering Little Rock Central High School. President Eisenhower, in response, sent members of the 101st Airborne Division from Kentucky to uphold the students' right to enter the school. In 1963, almost ten years after the ruling, Governor George Wallace of Alabama used his own body to block two black students from entering the auditorium at the University of Alabama to enroll in the school. Wallace's desperate attempt to uphold his policy of "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," stated during his 1963 inauguration (PBS 2000) became known as the "Stand in the Schoolhouse Door." He refused to grant entry to the students until a

general from the Alabama National Guard arrived on President Kennedy's order.



President Eisenhower sent members of the 101st Airborne Division from Kentucky to escort black students into Little Rock Central High School after the governor of Arkansas tried to deny them entry. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army)

Presently, students of all races and ethnicities are permitted into schools, but there remains a troubling gap in the equality of education they receive. The long-term socially embedded effects of racism—and other discrimination and disadvantage—have left a residual mark of inequality in the nation's education system. Students from wealthy families and those of lower socioeconomic status do not receive the same opportunities.

Today's public schools, at least in theory, are positioned to help remedy those gaps. Predicated on the notion of universal access, this system is mandated to accept and retain all students regardless of race, religion, social class, and the like. Moreover, public schools are held accountable to equitable per-student spending (Resnick 2004). Private schools, usually

only accessible to students from high-income families, and schools in more affluent areas generally enjoy access to greater resources and better opportunities. In fact, some of the key predictors for student performance include socioeconomic status and family background. Children from families of lower socioeconomic status often enter school with learning deficits they struggle to overcome throughout their educational tenure. These patterns, uncovered in the landmark Coleman Report of 1966, are still highly relevant today, as sociologists still generally agree that there is a great divide in the performance of white students from affluent backgrounds and their non-white, less affluent, counterparts (Coleman 1966).

Head Start

The findings in the Coleman Report were so powerful that they brought about two major changes to education in the United States. The federal **Head Start program**, which is still active and successful today, was developed to give low-income students an opportunity to make up the pre-school deficit discussed in Coleman's findings. The program provides academic-centered preschool to students of low socioeconomic status.

Busing

The second major change brought about after the release of the Coleman Report was less successful than the Head Start program and has been the subject of a great deal of controversy. With the goal of further desegregating education, courts across the United States ordered some school districts to begin a program that became known as "busing." This program involved bringing students to schools outside their neighborhoods (and therefore schools they would not normally have the opportunity to attend) to bring racial diversity into balance. This practice was met with a great deal of public resistance from people on both sides dissatisfied with white students traveling to inner city schools and minority students being transported to schools in the suburbs.

No Child Left Behind

In 2001, the Bush administration passed the **No Child Left Behind Act**, which requires states to test students in designated grades. The results of those tests determine eligibility to receive federal funding. Schools that do not meet the standards set by the Act run the risk of having their funding cut. Sociologists and teachers alike have contended that the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act is far more negative than positive, arguing that a “one size fits all” concept cannot apply to education.

Teaching to the Test

The funding tie-in of the No Child Left Behind Act has led to the social phenomenon commonly called “teaching to the test,” which describes when a curriculum focuses on equipping students to succeed on standardized tests, to the detriment of broader educational goals and concepts of learning. At issue are two approaches to classroom education: the notion that teachers impart knowledge that students are obligated to absorb, versus the concept of student-centered learning that seeks to teach children not facts, but problem solving abilities and learning skills. Both types of learning have been valued in the American school system. The former, to critics of “teaching to the test,” only equips students to regurgitate facts, while the latter, to proponents of the other camp, fosters lifelong learning and transferable work skills.

Bilingual Education

New issues of inequality have entered the national conversation in recent years with the issue of bilingual education, which attempts to give equal opportunity to minority students through offering instruction in languages other than English. Though it is actually an old issue (bilingual education was federally mandated in 1968), it remains one of hot debate. Supporters of bilingual education argue that all students deserve equal opportunities in education—opportunities some students cannot access without instruction in their first language. On the other side, those who oppose bilingual education often point to the need for English fluency in everyday life and in the professional world.

Charter Schools

Charter schools are self-governing public schools that have signed agreements with state governments to improve students when poor performance is revealed on tests required by the No Child Left Behind Act. While such schools receive public money, they are not subject to the same rules that apply to regular public schools. In return, they make agreements to achieve specific results. Charter schools, as part of the public education system, are free to attend, and are accessible via lottery when there are more students seeking enrollment than there are spots available at the school. Some charter schools specialize in certain fields, such as the arts or science, while others are more generalized.

Note:

Money as Motivation in Charter Schools

Public school teachers typically find stability, comprehensive benefits packages, and long-term job security. In 2011, one charter school in New York City set out to learn if teachers would give up those protections if it meant an opportunity to make much more money than the typical teacher's salary. The Equity Project is a privately run charter school that offered teachers positions paying \$125,000 per year (more than twice the average salary for teachers). The school's founder and principal, Zeke Vanderhoek, explained that this allows him to attract the best and brightest teachers to his school—to decide whom he hires and how much they are paid—and build a school where “every teacher is a great teacher” (CBS News 2011). He sees attracting top teachers as a direct road to student achievement. A nationwide talent search resulted in the submission of thousands of applications. The final round of interviews consisted of a day-long trial run. The school looks for teachers who can show evidence of student growth and achievement. They also must be highly engaging.

The majority of students at the school are African American and Hispanic, from poor families, and reading below grade level. The school faces the challenge faced by schools all over the United States: getting poor, disadvantaged students to perform at the same level as their more affluent

counterparts. Vanderhoek believes his team of dream teachers can help students close their learning gaps by several grade levels within one year. This is not an affluent school. It is publicly funded and classes are held in trailers. Most of the school's budget goes into the teachers' salaries. There are no reading or math aides; those roles are filled by the regular classroom teachers.

The experiment may be working. Students who were asked how they feel about their education at The Equity Project said that their teachers care if they succeed and give them the attention they need to achieve at high levels. They cite the feeling that their teachers believe in them as a major reason for liking school for the first time.

Of course, with the high salary comes high risk. Most public schools offer contracts to teachers. Those contracts guarantee job security. But The Equity Project is an at-will employer. Those who don't meet the standards set by the school will lose their jobs. Vanderhoek does not believe in teacher tenure, which he feels gives teachers "a job for life no matter how they perform" (CBS News 2011). With a teaching staff of roughly 15, he terminated two teachers after the first year. In comparison, in New York City as a whole, only seven teachers out of 55,000 with tenure have been terminated for poor performance.

One of those two teachers who was let go said she was relieved, citing 80- to 90-hour work weeks and a decline in the quality of her family life.

Meanwhile, there is some question as to whether the model is working. On one hand, there are individual success stories, such as a student whose reading skills increased two grade levels in a single year. On the other, there is the fact that on the state math and reading exams taken by all fifth graders, the Equity Project students remained out-scored by other district schools (CBS News 2011).

Teacher Training

Schools face an issue of teacher effectiveness, in that most high school teachers perceive students as being prepared for college, while most college professors do not see those same students as prepared for the rigors of collegiate study. Some feel that this is due to teachers being unprepared to

teach. Many teachers in the United States teach subject matter that is outside their own field of study. This is not the case in many European and Asian countries. Only eight percent of United States fourth-grade math teachers majored or minored in math, compared with 48 percent in Singapore. Further, students in disadvantaged American schools are 77 percent more likely to be educated by a teacher who didn't specialize in the subject matter than students who attend schools in affluent neighborhoods (Holt, McGrath, and Seastrom 2006).

Social Promotion

Social promotion is another issue identified by sociologists. This is the concept of passing students to the next grade regardless of their meeting standards for that grade. Critics of this practice argue that students should never move to the next grade if they have not mastered the skills required to “graduate” from the previous grade. Proponents of the practice question what a school is to do with a student who is three to four years older than other students in his or her grade, saying this creates more issues than the practice of social promotion.

Affirmative Action

Affirmative action has been a subject of debate, primarily as it relates to the admittance of college students. Opponents suggest that, under affirmative action, minority students are given greater weighted priorities for admittance. Supporters of affirmative action point to the way in which it grants opportunities to students who are traditionally done a disservice in the college admission process.

Rising Student Loan Debt

In a growing concern, the amount of college loan debt that students are taking on is creating a new social challenge. As of 2010, the debts of students with student loans averaged \$25,250 upon graduation, leaving students hard-pressed to repay their education while earning entry-level wages, even at the professional level (Lewin 2011). With the increase in

unemployment since the 2008 recession, jobs are scarce, making this burden more pronounced. As recent grads find themselves unable to meet their financial obligations, all of society is affected.

Home Schooling

Homeschooling refers to children being educated in their own homes, typically by a parent, instead of in a traditional public or private school system. Proponents of this type of education argue that it provides an outstanding opportunity for student-centered learning while circumventing problems that plague today's education system. Opponents counter that homeschooled children miss out on the opportunity for social development that occurs in standard classroom environments and school settings.

Proponents say that parents know their own children better than anyone else and are thus best equipped to teach them. Those on the other side of the debate assert that childhood education is a complex task and requires the degree teachers spend four years earning. After all, they argue, a parent may know her child's body better than anyone, yet she seeks out a doctor for her child's medical treatment. Just as a doctor is a trained medical expert, teachers are trained education experts.

The National Center for Education Statistics shows that the quality of the national education system isn't the only major concern of homeschoolers. While nearly half cite their reason for homeschooling as the belief that they can give their child a better education than the school system can, just under 40 percent choose homeschooling for "religious reasons" (NCES 2008).

To date, researchers have not found consensus in studies evaluating the success, or lack thereof, of homeschooling.

Summary

As schools continue to fill many roles in the lives of students, challenges arise. Historical issues include the racial desegregation of schools, marked by the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling. In today's diverse educational landscape, socioeconomic status and diversity remain at

the heart of issues in education, with programs such as the Head Start program attempting to give students equal footing. Other educational issues that impact society include charter schools, teaching to the test, student loan debt, and homeschooling.

Section Quiz

Exercise:

Problem: *Plessy v. Ferguson* set the precedent that _____.

- a. racial segregation in schools was allowed
 - b. separate schools for black and white students were unconstitutional
 - c. students do not have a right to free speech in public schools
 - d. students have a right to free speech in public schools
-

Solution:

Answer

A

Exercise:

Problem: Public schools must guarantee that _____.

- a. all students graduate from high school
 - b. all students receive an equal education
 - c. per-student spending is equitable
 - d. the amount spent on each student is equal to that spent regionally
-

Solution:

Answer

C

Exercise:

Problem: Key predictors for student success include _____.

- a. how many school-age siblings the student has
 - b. socioeconomic status and family background
 - c. the age of the student when she or he enters kindergarten
 - d. how many students attend the school
-

Solution:

Answer

B

Exercise:

Problem:

Allowing a student to move to the next grade regardless of whether or not they have met the requirements for that grade is called _____.

- a. affirmative action
 - b. social control
 - c. social promotion
 - d. socialization
-

Solution:

Answer

C

Short Answer

Exercise:

Problem:

Is busing a reasonable method of serving students from diverse backgrounds? If not, suggest and support an alternative.

Further Research

Whether or not students in public schools are entitled to free speech is a subject of much debate. In the public school system, there can be a clash between the need for a safe learning environment and the guarantee to free speech granted to Americans. You can learn more about this complicated issue at the Center for Public Education.

http://openstaxcollege.org/l/center_public_education

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Glossary

Head Start program

a federal program that provides academically focused preschool to students of low socioeconomic status

No Child Left Behind Act

requires states to test students in prescribed grades, with the results of those tests determining eligibility to receive federal funding